



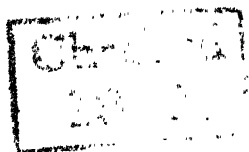
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BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS  
OF THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY

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# BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS

## CHAPTER I

*HENRY ADDINGTON*

(MARCH, 1801—MAY, 1804)

FEW centuries of the Christian era have opened more inauspiciously for Great Britain than the nineteenth. The Government of George III. was at war with the rejuvenated France over which Napoleon Bonaparte had secured control. The great coalition against the French which Pitt had laboriously constructed in 1799 had completely collapsed; Russia had broken away amid furious recriminations in 1800; Austria, after the crushing defeats of Marengo and Hohenlinden, was negotiating a separate peace at Lunéville. Britain was left to face the might of the First Consul alone. To make her situation worse, the Baltic Powers, resentful of the manner in which she exercised her command of the sea, had organised an Armed Neutrality (December, 1800), whose purpose was to resist the British claim to search neutral vessels on the high seas and confiscate contraband of war found upon them. At home much distress prevailed owing to the rapid increase in population, the disorganisation of industry and commerce due to the war, and the failure of the harvest of 1800—a failure that caused the price of wheat to rise to 102s. a quarter. Finally, Ireland was seething with rebellion. The rising of 1798, together with its severe repression, was still fresh in men's memories. Passions continued, moreover, to run high respecting the Act of Union which Pitt, as a war measure, had forced through the Parliaments of the two countries: it came



into force on the first day of the century. But what caused the greatest perturbation was the fact that Pitt was being prevented by the King from fulfilling one of the promises by means of which he had persuaded the Irish Parliament to consent to its own extinction. He had promised Ireland a generous measure of Catholic Emancipation. George III. had allowed him to make the promise; but when Pitt approached him respecting the terms of its fulfilment, he was informed that the King's coronation oath to defend the Protestant establishment would not permit him to open the doors of Parliament and office to Papists. Pitt, feeling that his honour was involved, placed his resignation in the King's hands (March 14, 1801). Other causes, also, conduced to the same end. He had been Prime Minister since December, 1783; he was weary, out of health, prematurely old, though but little over forty years of age. Above all, he realised that the country needed peace, if it could be procured; and he felt that he, after all he had said and done against the French in general and Bonaparte in particular, was not the man to seek or obtain it. Hence he resigned with relief, advising the King to send for his friend, Henry Addington.

Henry Addington, later Lord Sidmouth, was a fortunate rather than an eminent man. His father gave him his start in life; his friends kept him in upward motion. "He was remarkable," said one who knew him well, "only for *not* being remarkable." He had, however, a distinct faculty for friendship. He was amiable, companionable, popular, until he was spoiled by being made Prime Minister. From that unhappy date he developed a conceit and a sense of importance that overshadowed his more attractive qualities. He was mediocre in intelligence, lacking in energy and initiative, incapable of formulating a policy, unfitted to grasp and give effect to the policy of others, a mere reactionary. The intensity of his Toryism commended him to the King: like George III., he was equally op-



posed to the administrative reforms effected by Burke, the parliamentary reforms advocated by Fox, and the religious reforms adumbrated by Pitt and Canning.

Perhaps the most noteworthy fact about him is that he was the first man to become Prime Minister direct from the ranks of the middle class. His father, Anthony Addington, had been a successful physician of Reading and London: he had regularly ministered to the great Earl of Chatham and his family, and had occasionally been consulted by the King. His pleasant bedside manner, combined with his skill in getting the gout out of Chatham's feet and the lunacy out of George's head—had commended him to his illustrious patients, and had enabled him to further the fortunes of his son Henry. Henry became the intimate friend of the young William Pitt, who was two years his junior. Pitt, having become Prime Minister, procured a seat for Addington at Devizes in the great election of 1784, and he became one of Pitt's most trusty supporters during the whole of his long ministry. When he had secured admission to the presence of the King, the mediocrity of his mind, the agreeableness of his person, and the profundity of his prejudices soon won him a high place in George's favour. Since he did not shine in debate, he was pleased in 1789 to be appointed Speaker of the House of Commons, the duties of which office he performed excellently well until the time of his elevation to the place of Prime Minister. In 1801 he was employed by the King to try to persuade Pitt to withdraw his proposals for Catholic Emancipation. He, of course, failed to do so, and, having failed, he was quite prepared to listen to the joint proposal of his two masters that he should, until the Irish trouble had blown over, occupy the office of Prime Minister. He humbly admitted that he was only Mr. Pitt's *locum tenens*.

The Cabinet which Addington got together in March, 1801, was a collection of nonentities: it became known as "the Ministry of none of the talents."



## 6 BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS

Nevertheless, as it had the favour of the King, the assistance of Pitt, and the support of a solid Tory majority in the House of Commons, it was easily able to carry on the Government. Moreover, for a time fortune favoured it. Within a week of its establishment Abercromby gained a decisive victory over the French at Alexandria and compelled the armies of Bonaparte to evacuate Egypt. On April 2, Nelson caused the total collapse of the Armed Neutrality by his defeat of the Danes at Copenhagen. Above all, Addington, whose inability to wage war made him sincerely pacific, at the end of twelve months (March, 1802) successfully concluded with Bonaparte the Treaty of Amiens, which terminated the conflict with France that had been raging since the beginning of 1793.

The conclusion of this treaty, the terms of which could not possibly have been accepted by Pitt, marked the apogee of Addington's good fortune. The country was so thoroughly tired of apparently fruitless war that any sort of a peace was welcome. For a moment Addington enjoyed a mild popularity. It sufficed to turn his head. He began to think that he was as great a man as Pitt, and that he had no need of anyone's support. He ceased to consult Pitt, and, when Pitt withdrew in lofty dudgeon into the country, he ventured to describe his Olympian aloofness as "sulking." Pitt, therefore, came back and speedily transmuted his silent resentment into vocal criticism. In doing so he merely joined himself to his cousin, William Grenville, and to his old antagonist, Charles James Fox, both of whom had been vehemently hostile to Addington from the first.

The three critics of Addington's mediocre Ministry soon had enough to talk about. For the Treaty of Amiens had scarcely been completed when Napoleon Bonaparte began a process of peaceful penetration on the Continent that rapidly added to his already dangerously wide dominions more subject territories than he had been able to acquire in all the course of his wars. Under



one pretext or another he established his authority over the whole of Northern Italy; he made himself complete master of the Dutch Netherlands; by securing his own election as "mediator" of the Swiss Cantons, he acquired a virtual sovereignty over the Helvetic Republic. When the pacific Addington ventured, through the British Ambassador, to make mild inquiries concerning these enormous aggressions, or to utter gentle protests, he was met with such storms of vituperation from the ferocious First Consul that he incontinently curled up. Finally, when, in apparently direct violation of the Treaty of Amiens, a French mission made its appearance in Egypt, the rising indignation of Britain compelled even Addington to uncurl, and forced him to send so strong a remonstrance to France that, on its reception, the British Ambassador was forthwith, and in the most humiliating manner, packed straight away home (May 17, 1803).

To Napoleon Bonaparte the Peace of Amiens had never been more than a temporary truce. He needed it in order to carry through a number of domestic reforms; he needed it, still more, in order to prepare for a life-or-death struggle with the island empire whose command of the sea alone stood between himself and world dominion. In 1803 he was ready for the fray, and he welcomed any pretext for a declaration of war. He found a pretext in the fact that Britain, in alarm at the French activities in Egypt, had delayed to fulfil its treaty obligation to evacuate Malta. Loudly trumpeting, therefore, the perfidy of Albion, he declared a war of extermination against his protean foe, and prepared for an invasion of England.

If Addington was useful for making and maintaining peace, he was no good at all at organising a struggle for existence. In vain did he seek to allay the national agitation by enrolling volunteers and calling them by such terrifying names as "The Devil's Own." In vain did he order the construction of Martello



Towers round the South Coast. In vain did he project the excavation of a deep defensive ditch across the line of the prospective French advance on London. The country had no confidence in him or in his ingenious devices. It called aloud for Pitt. At last, Addington, hearing the call, invited Pitt to join his Cabinet. Pitt contemptuously declined. Then he suggested that Pitt and himself should jointly serve as Secretaries of State under the nominal headship of Pitt's elder brother, the negligible Earl of Chatham. This suggestion Pitt also declined to consider. Next, he declared his readiness to give place to Pitt, provided Pitt would retain himself and the majority of his colleagues in the new Cabinet. But Pitt refused to accept any conditions. So, finally, Addington simply resigned and Pitt came back (May, 1804). Addington survived his resignation for no less than forty years, and he held minor office in no fewer than four subsequent Governments. Canning, indeed, spoke of him as a scourge from which every Tory administration was bound, for a time, to suffer. He and Lord Eldon became the twin geniuses of unintelligent reaction. Together they secured the imposition of the Six Acts of 1819; together they steadily opposed Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform, and every liberal measure of the early nineteenth century. So long as Henry Addington, Lord Sidmouth, lived, the spirit of George III. brooded over Toryism.

## CHAPTER II

### *WILLIAM PITT*

(MAY, 1804—JANUARY, 1806)

CONCERNING Pitt's second Ministry not much need here be said. Pitt's great work had been accomplished in the eighteenth century. During the ten years of peace



1783-93 he had restored purity to the Government of the country and had initiated a notable series of cautious conservative reforms. During the eight years of war, 1793-1801, although he had shown none of his father's genius for military affairs, he had inspired the nation with a high courage and with an invincible determination to resist revolution. After the three years' interval of Addington's administration, he came back (May, 1804) broken in health, though still full of spirit. The enormous labours and the appalling anxieties of the next two years wore him out, and he died, at the early age of forty-six, in January, 1806.

When, in 1804, Pitt undertook the task of re-forming the Government, he was most desirous, in view of the critical condition of affairs, to effect a coalition of all the talents. In criticism of Addington he had been closely associated with Grenville and Windham, who carried on the Whig traditions of Edmund Burke, and with Charles James Fox, who led the more radical section of the Opposition. He therefore wished to include Grenville, Windham, and Fox, together with some of their colleagues, in his Ministry. George III., however, had never modified his intense detestation and disapproval of Fox, and he absolutely refused to see him or to consider his admission to office. In those circumstances, Grenville and Windham declined to accept appointment, and Pitt was left to do the best he could with Tories. He managed to construct some sort of a Cabinet out of Eldon, Hawkesbury, Castlereagh, Camden, and the like.

The one colossal task of the new administration was, of course, to meet the attack of Napoleon, who, in the very month of Pitt's accession to office, had assumed the title of hereditary Emperor of the French. The Emperor—undisputed master of half Europe, and free from all Continental distractions—was bent on the invasion and destruction of Britain. He was collecting a large and splendidly appointed army in the vicinity of



Boulogne; he was preparing a vast flotilla of transports by means of which to convey it across the Channel; he was formulating a brilliant plan of campaign in accordance with which he was to secure the command of the sea for a sufficiently long time to allow a crossing and a landing to be made.

Pitt's precautionary measures were two. First, he sent his seamen—Nelson, Collingwood, and their fellows—to watch the harbours where the enemies' fleets were sheltering, so as to prevent them from concentrating and to frustrate any attempt on their part to enter the Channel. Secondly, he exercised all his influence and his skill to persuade the Continental Powers to join Britain in a new coalition against the menace of French domination. His first success was achieved in the diplomatic sphere. After much negotiation he won over Russia (April, 1805), Austria (August), and Prussia (November), and organised them into an anti-Napoleonic league. The result of this diplomatic triumph was immediate. In the summer of 1805, Napoleon broke up his camp at Boulogne, converted the "army of England" into the "army of Austria," and inaugurated the campaign that culminated in his great victory at Austerlitz, over the combined Russian and Austrian armies, on December 2.

Before the news of this shattering blow reached Pitt he had been able to rejoice at the success of his naval enterprises. On October 21, 1805, after a series of brilliant manœuvres, Nelson and Collingwood had brought the French and Spanish fleets to action off Cape Trafalgar and had destroyed them. All fear of a French invasion passed away. "England," said Pitt in his last speech, at the Guildhall on November 9, "England has saved herself by her exertions; she will, I trust, save Europe by her example." His great utterance remained true even when the defeat of the allies at Austerlitz made it evident that the saving of Europe would be a longer and more painful process than he



had anticipated. When, however, the news of the Austro-Russian rout reached Pitt, he realised that he, at any rate, would not live to see the day of salvation. Pointing to a map of the Continent, he said: "Roll up that map; it will not be wanted these ten years." If he had actually foreseen Waterloo, he could hardly have been more exact. The shock of disappointment was, however, more than his weakened constitution could bear. He rapidly sank into despondency and decrepitude, and on January 23, 1806, passed away. The day of his death was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the day on which he had entered Parliament.

## CHAPTER III

*WILLIAM, LORD GRENVILLE*

(FEBRUARY, 1806—MARCH, 1807)

THE dismay caused by the death of Pitt, which followed so hard after the disaster of Austerlitz, caused even George III. to forget some of his prejudices. The triumphant progress of Napoleon on the Continent terrified the warring politicians of Westminster into coalition. Like a flock of frightened sheep they came together, agreeing that nothing short of a Ministry of "all the talents" would be equal to the task of maintaining the cause of Britain against the conqueror. George III. concurred in their view, and intimated his willingness to admit even Charles James Fox to his presence and his counsels. Hence arose another of Burke's "tessellated" administrations, strong in Parliament because there was no organised opposition to harass it, but weak in the world because it represented no coherent principles and had no definite policy. Grenville, who became First Lord of the Treasury, and his friend Windham were old Whigs of the Con-



servative type; Fox and Grey were radical reformers; Sidmouth and Ellenborough were reactionary Tories.

William, Lord Grenville, the new Prime Minister, was the third and youngest son of that George Grenville who himself had been First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer at the beginning of George III.'s reign (1763-65). William, who had been born in the same year as his cousin, the younger Pitt—*i.e.*, 1759—had shown himself, both at Eton and at Christ Church, to be possessed of scholarly abilities far above the ordinary. He had become an adept at the art of writing Latin verse, his *Nugæ Metricæ* being long admired in select academic circles. He would have made a first-rate don; but the traditions of his family compelled him to become a second-rate politician. He entered Parliament in 1782 as Member for Buckingham, and before the end of the year was appointed Chief Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl Temple, his elder brother. Next year his cousin, William Pitt, conferred upon him the extremely lucrative post of Paymaster of the Forces. In 1789 he became Pitt's Home Secretary; in 1790 he was created a peer; in 1791 he became Minister for Foreign Affairs, and that important office he held for the ten critical years that saw the revolutionary war. He showed himself to be an admirably capable and conscientious, if entirely commonplace, Minister. In respect of the war, his sympathies were rather with Burke than with his cousin, and some friction resulted. In the matter of Catholic Emancipation, however, he was wholeheartedly with Pitt, and, when the King refused to permit Pitt to keep his promise to the Irish, Grenville went out of office with him. During Addington's Ministry, Grenville associated himself with Fox in chronic opposition, and he determined not to take office again unless he could bring Fox with him. Thus he broke with Pitt in 1804, but succeeded him as head of the Ministry of "all the talents" in February, 1806.



Grenville's miscellaneous and nondescript administration was but short-lived. Its one notable man was Fox; but he survived his appointment as Foreign Secretary only eight months. He lived just long enough, on the one hand, to win the cordial regard of the King by the inimitable charm of his personality, and, on the other hand, to dispel the illusion—under which he had laboured for fourteen years—that England could have peace with France for the asking. He eagerly negotiated with Napoleon, but could get nothing from him. He kept out of Continental entanglements, and saw Prussia overwhelmed at Jena without lifting a finger to save her. Under his infatuated pacificism Britain became an object of hatred and contempt among the peoples of Europe. Although, however, in his proper sphere of foreign affairs Fox was an unmitigated failure, in another sphere he aided in the accomplishment of a noble work. This work was that to which William Wilberforce had consecrated the talents and energies of his devoted life—namely, the abolition of the slave trade—the achievement of which was completed in March, 1807.

The passing of this Act was almost the last performance of the Ministry. For Grenville had raised the spectre of Catholic Emancipation. On this question he was a zealot, and he brought it forward well knowing that it would certainly drive Sidmouth out of his Cabinet, probably entail his own resignation, and possibly send George III. into a lunatic asylum. Sidmouth went. George was furiously angry; he not only declined to consider the matter, but demanded from Grenville a promise never to mention it to him again. This promise Grenville declined to give, and was accordingly compelled to resign. Sheridan, who lost a well-paid post when the Ministry fell, remarked with some feeling: "I have known many men knock their heads against a wall; but I never before heard of a man collecting bricks and building a wall for the



express purpose of knocking out his own brains against it."

Grenville never again held any office. He retired to his country house, Dropmore, in Buckinghamshire, where, till his death in 1834, he employed himself in the cultivation of vegetables, the annotation of Homer, and the manufacture of Latin verse.

## CHAPTER IV

### *THE DUKE OF PORTLAND*

(MARCH, 1807—OCTOBER, 1809)

WILLIAM CAVENDISH-BENTINCK, third Duke of Portland, who succeeded Grenville as Prime Minister, had already on two occasions played a prominent part in politics. As official chief of the Whig party after the death of Rockingham, he had accepted the nominal headship of that amazing Fox-North coalition which in 1783 had ousted Shelburne from power, and for eight months had held office in spite of both furious King and scandalised people. In 1794, when the French Revolution had disarrayed British politics and had split the Whig party in permanent schism, Portland had taken the lead of the conservative section who followed in the train of Burke, as against the radical section who followed in the train of Fox and Sheridan. He and his chief supporters—*e.g.*, Fitzwilliam and Windham—signalled their adhesion to conservatism by joining Pitt's Ministry.

On the crucial question of Catholic Emancipation, Portland—who had at one time been Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland—sided with Addington and the anti-emancipationists as against Pitt and Canning and the more liberal conservatives. He had been a member of Addington's anti-Catholic Cabinet. He therefore



seemed to George III. to be the most appropriate person to form a Government in succession to the emancipationist Grenville.

The main obstacles to Portland's appointment were age and infirmity. He was nearly seventy years old, and he was in wretched health. Nevertheless, he yielded to the King's solicitations, on the understanding that all the serious work of Government should be performed by his younger and more active colleagues—Perceval, Hawkesbury, Castlereagh, and Canning.

The transference of office from Grenville to Portland was followed, not only by a change in the attitude of the Government towards the religious emancipation question, but also by a marked revival of British activity in foreign affairs. In 1806, Napoleon had completely overwhelmed Prussia; in 1807 he overthrew Russia and made with the Tsar Alexander I. the Treaty of Tilsit (July), which not merely terminated the state of war between the two emperors, but converted them into allies bent on the destruction of perfidious Albion. Canning, the new and brilliant Secretary for Foreign Affairs, heard, by way of Spain, of the carefully guarded secret of the pact of Tilsit, and learned that the design of the plotters was to secure the Danish fleet and use it for the coercion of Britain. Anticipating the Franco-Russian coup, he sent the British fleet to Copenhagen and compelled the Danes to surrender their ships pending the conclusion of the war (September, 1807). His second great achievement was his determination to end the period of British inactivity on the Continent by acceding to the prayers of the Portuguese and Spaniards for assistance in their efforts to expel the French, who had crossed the Pyrenees, dispossessed the Spanish royal house, and invaded Portugal. His was the initiative that inaugurated the Peninsular War, whose slow, exhausting process was destined to drain away the resources and the strength of the Napoleonic Empire.

But Canning, as Secretary for Foreign Affairs, be-



came, as time went on, extremely dissatisfied with the way in which Castlereagh, as Secretary for War, managed his part of the business. In particular, he was annoyed at the incompetence and extravagance displayed in the disastrous Walcheren Expedition of 1809. Hence, he made strong representations to the Duke of Portland, urging that Castlereagh should be moved to some other office and that the Marquis Wellesley—recently returned from India—should be placed in charge of the War Office. Castlereagh heard indirectly of Canning's solicitations on his behalf, and signalled his appreciation of them by challenging Canning to a duel. The duel was fought on September 21. Canning was slightly wounded; both the combatants resigned their offices. The Duke of Portland, who was very ill, took the opportunity to follow their excellent example. He survived his resignation barely a month, dying on October 29, 1809.

## CHAPTER V

### *SPENCER PERCEVAL*

(OCTOBER, 1809—MAY, 1812)

THE resignation of Portland did not involve any serious reconstruction of the Ministry or any material change of policy. Spencer Perceval had been Portland's Chancellor of the Exchequer and the effective head of his administration since its inauguration. On succeeding to the office of First Lord of the Treasury, he did not feel it necessary to give up his post of Chancellor. Canning's place at the Foreign Office was filled for a few weeks by Earl Bathurst, and then, more permanently, by the Marquis Wellesley. The duties of Castlereagh at the War Office were taken over by Lord Hawkesbury, who in 1808 had succeeded his father as Earl of Liverpool.



The new Prime Minister was a lawyer by profession. Born in 1762, he was a younger son of the second Earl of Egmont, an Irish peer. After a sound education at Harrow and Cambridge, he proceeded to the Bar. As the younger son of a not very wealthy nobleman, he found himself with but £200 a year of private income. As the husband of a devoted and fruitful wife, he found himself by degrees the father of twelve expensive children. Hence he had to work hard at law. This he did with such notable success that in 1796 he both took silk and entered Parliament. His thorough knowledge of the law and his great skill as a debater made him an invaluable supporter of Pitt, and it soon became clear that he was marked out for high office. His opinions were vehemently Tory. He fully shared the prepossessions of Eldon and Addington, being equally opposed to Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary reform. When, therefore, Pitt resigned in 1801, Perceval had no hesitation in taking office under Addington: he was made Solicitor-General in 1801 and Attorney-General in 1802. He continued in office under Pitt, 1804-6. He, of course, refused to serve under Grenville, and his effective conduct of the Tory Opposition did much to discredit and disperse "all the talents" in 1807. Circumstances, therefore, marked him out as Portland's right-hand man in 1807, and as his successor in 1809.

His two and a half years of Premiership were almost wholly occupied by the titanic struggle with Napoleon. This great conflict had two aspects. First, the Ministry, by means of Orders in Council, enforced by the fleet, had to break down those barriers to trade which Napoleon had erected through his Berlin and Milan decrees; it had to keep Britain supplied with food and raw materials, and it had to re-open the ports of the Continent to British ships and British goods. Secondly, it had to conduct the Peninsular War and to run a number of side shows, such as the expedition to Mauritius in 1810 and to Java in 1811. The one



domestic measure of prime importance which Perceval had to carry through was the Regency Bill of 1811. In that year, owing to grief at the death of the Princess Amelia, George III.'s tottering reason finally collapsed, and the Prince of Wales had to be invested with the powers of Regent. With great courage, and in spite of strong protests from both the Prince and his friends in Parliament, Perceval carried a Regency Bill that limited the Prince's power for mischief in a manner that was highly beneficial for the country, but profoundly obnoxious to His Royal Highness. The Prince, at first, thought of punishing Perceval by dismissing him and calling the Whigs to form a Government. But prudence prevailed, and he made no effort to dislodge the Tories.

Scarcely had Perceval begun to feel himself once more secure in office when he was assassinated by a madman as he entered the Lobby of the House of Commons on May 11, 1812. He was only fifty years of age, and in the height of his powers.

## CHAPTER VI

### *THE EARL OF LIVERPOOL*

(MAY, 1812—APRIL, 1827)

THE lamentable murder of Perceval threw the administration into confusion. The Cabinet contained none but mediocrities; for Wellesley, who had shown indisputable genius in India, had speedily made it evident that he totally lacked the gifts and graces necessary to conduct parliamentary government in England. The Regent, who had not as yet entirely lost his Whig proclivities, wished to take the opportunity to broaden the basis of the administration. But the Whig leaders—Grenville, Grey, and Moira—would not come in on



any terms that the Tories could accept. Hence there was nothing to be done except to rearrange the old gang. The two outstanding Tories of genius or power were Castlereagh and Canning. But, although in principle and policy they did not differ so much as has sometimes been supposed, they hated one another like poison. Neither would consent to serve under the other. Hence a *tertium quid* had to be found, and he was found in Lord Liverpool.

It is the custom to speak and write contemptuously of Lord Liverpool. Disraeli set the fashion by referring to him repeatedly in his novels as the "arch-mediocrity." An excellent story respecting Madame de Staël tended to confirm the impression created by Disraeli's disparaging epithet. This sprightly French lady visited England immediately after the war, and met the Prime Minister at a party. She spoke to him of some of the people she had known in London long years ago, in the days before the Revolution. She had renewed her acquaintance with many of them. "But where," she said, "is that *very* stupid Mr. Jenkinson?" The Prime Minister, with admirable good humour, replied: "He is now the Earl of Liverpool."

The Earl of Liverpool was, however, by no means, according to English standards, a very stupid man, although, no doubt, he lacked the *vivacité* that Madame de Staël had been accustomed to find in the *salons* of Paris. There was, however, no question at all as to his thorough-going Toryism; no taint of yellow marred the perfection of his true blue. His father, Charles Jenkinson, had been secretary to the notorious Earl of Bute, tutor to George III. and Prime Minister in 1762-63. After Bute's retirement, Jenkinson had remained at Court and in Parliament as leader of the "King's friends." His devotion to the royal service had raised him to the Peerage as Baron Hawkesbury (1786) and Earl of Liverpool (1796).

Robert Banks Jenkinson, the son of Charles, was



born in 1770. He received a good education at the Charterhouse and at Christ Church, after the completion of which he travelled for three years (1789-92) on the Continent, making himself acquainted with France, Italy, and Germany, and acquiring a working knowledge of their languages. On his return he entered Parliament, and he signalised his entry by making a maiden speech of such excellence as to win the warm encomiums of Pitt. He specialised in foreign policy, and acquired so high a reputation as an authority that, when Addington became Prime Minister, he was invited by him to become Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. In that capacity it fell to his lot to carry through the difficult and delicate negotiations that ended in the Treaty of Amiens. He showed himself completely competent for his task. When Pitt returned to power (1804) he made Jenkinson—who since 1796 had been known as Lord Hawkesbury, and who under that title had been raised to the Peerage in 1803—Home Secretary and leader of the House of Lords. His pleasant personality and unaggressive kindliness caused him to be liked by all men. He was in high favour with the King; he was able to reconcile Pitt and Addington to one another after their serious quarrel of 1804.

That Lord Hawkesbury—who succeeded his father as Earl of Liverpool in 1808—was not a mere *tertium quid* is clearly indicated by the fact that, before he was invited in 1812 to become Prime Minister, he had twice declined the offer of that eminent position: he had been asked to succeed Pitt in 1806, and Grenville in 1807. He had, however, been content to serve as Home Secretary to Portland (1807-9), and as War Secretary to Perceval (1809-12). In his latter capacity he had been responsible for the conduct of the Peninsular War, and it is sufficient tribute to his efficiency that he satisfied the requirements of both Wellington, his commander abroad, and Palmerston, his colleague at home. Neither



the one nor the other was accustomed to pay compliments to incompetence.

As Prime Minister he showed his powers of conciliation and mollification by the skill with which he persuaded Castlereagh and Canning to live together in harmony. He acted as the mucilage that emulsified their incompatibilities. He himself held strong views, but he did not hold them strongly. That is to say, he had a sense for the practical and practicable in politics. He was, for instance, a convinced anti-Catholic who believed that emancipation would inflict severe injury upon the Constitution. He recognised, however, that both Canning and Castlereagh were equally sincerely convinced to the contrary. He therefore declared Catholic Emancipation to be an open question in the Cabinet, and he allowed all his colleagues to speak with perfect freedom on either side of the controversy, both in Parliament and on platform. His sweet—perhaps over-sweet—reasonableness and his—perhaps excessive—self-effacement enabled him to hold his Ministry together for the long period of fifteen years.

For the first ten years of his Ministry, Castlereagh was the dominant influence in the Government. Discipline, authority, repression, reaction, were the watch-words of the administration. The great war was ended triumphantly; the Peace of Vienna was concluded; the Quadruple Alliance was instituted. At home, agriculture was protected by a stringent Corn Law; unrest was suppressed by means of the rigorous Five Acts of 1817 and the still more severe Six Acts of 1819. Abroad, the movements towards democracy and nationality were discountenanced.

The death of Castlereagh in 1822 synchronised with a change in the policy of the Government. The panic caused by the French Revolution was passing away. A programme of mere repression was felt to be incapable of meeting the needs of the new age. Liberalism crept



into the domestic policy of the administration with the entry of Peel, Huskisson, and Robinson into the Cabinet. When, in August, 1822, Canning succeeded Castlereagh as Secretary for Foreign Affairs, a new spirit began to inspire the British Diplomatic Service. From 1822 to 1827, Canning was the dominant figure in Liverpool's Cabinet. During all these five years Liverpool's health was failing. The burden of work and responsibility that fell upon him was excessively great. The constant intrigues of Canning, who was a born conspirator, were a wearing source of anxiety. In February, 1827, he had an apoplectic stroke; in the following April he resigned all his offices; on December 4, 1828, he died.

## CHAPTER VII

### *GEORGE CANNING*

(APRIL—AUGUST, 1827)

THE resignation of Liverpool in April, 1827, made the succession of George Canning to the Premiership inevitable. Personal ambition was Canning's predominant quality. He had wanted to be Prime Minister when Perceval was appointed in 1809; again in 1812 he was much annoyed that the unobtrusive Liverpool had been preferred before him. The principal obstacle to his promotion, indeed, was his pushfulness. He made so many enemies by his egoism that, so long as he could be kept out, he was kept out. By 1827, however, he had made himself ineluctable. His power in Parliament, and still more in the country, was such that if he had not been made Prime Minister he could—and certainly would—have made any other administration impossible. In the spring of 1827, George IV., who distrusted him and intensely disliked



him, held out against him as long as possible. But at length he had to yield.

Canning, on receiving the seals of office, announced that it was his intention to continue the policy of Lord Liverpool, and he hoped that all the members of the old Cabinet would continue to serve under the new management. Canning, however, totally lacked the emulsifying qualities of Liverpool. He was, on the contrary, an irritant and disintegrating acid. He could not, like Liverpool, hold strong opinions without expressing them, or approve of a policy without pursuing it. It was known that he believed in Catholic Emancipation, in Free Trade, in Greek independence, in the principle of nationality, and in many other things more appropriate to a Radical than to an old-fashioned Tory. Hence, for political—apart from acute personal—reasons, Eldon, Wellington, Sidmouth, Bathurst, Melville, and—greatest blow of all—Peel refused to hold office under him. Only such comparatively unknown men as Robinson—made Viscount Goderich—Huskisson, Bexley, and Palmerston consented to follow his lead. The defection of the ultra-Tories compelled him to seek an alliance with the Whigs. As the result of much harassing negotiation, he at last succeeded in drawing into his Ministry the Marquis of Lansdowne, the Earl of Carlisle, and George Tierney.

What he would have done with his nondescript array if he had lived to drill it and lead it into action will never be known, and cannot be imagined. Canning himself was a mass of incompatible ideas; his Cabinet was a congeries of antagonistic elements. It is difficult to conceive that anything but chaos could have been evolved. Nevertheless, Canning had the spark of genius, and perhaps as Prime Minister he could have clarified his own mind and have co-ordinated his Cabinet. But we shall never know. For he held office for but four months. He was very ill when he was appointed; his illness was much aggravated by the dis-



appointments and annoyances he met with in the construction of his Ministry. In July he had to take to his bed. On August 8, 1827, he died.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *VISCOUNT GODERICH*

(AUGUST, 1827—JANUARY, 1828)

DISRAELI did Lord Liverpool some wrong when he labelled him for all posterity as the "arch-mediocrity"; he would have done his emollient personality more justice if he had called him the supreme conciliator and compromiser—the arch-via-mediocrity. The value of his soothing and softening services was clearly manifest after his death amid the furious conflicts that broke out among the discordant politicians whom he left rampant on the field of affairs. The man who had managed with gracious skill to keep Castlereagh and Canning in the same Cabinet would not have allowed small fry like Herries and Huskisson to wreck a Government. Yet that is what "Prosperity Robinson," otherwise Viscount Goderich, and later Earl of Ripon, did. Disraeli exactly hit him off when he termed him a "transient and embarrassed phantom."

Frederick Robinson, the second son of the second Lord Grantham, was a predestined second all his life. Born 1782, he had entered Parliament in 1807. His high connections and his amiable qualities secured for him a succession of minor offices under Portland, Perceval, and Liverpool in turn. He attached himself to the party of George Canning, and Canning's influence secured for him in 1823 the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, where he had acted as a useful second to Huskisson, the energetic President of the Board of Trade. He had earned his nickname "Prosperity" from a speech he had made in introducing the



Budget of 1825. In this oration he had descanted complacently on the excellent condition of the country and its finances. His pleasing picture of prosperity was immediately followed by a severe commercial crisis in which fifty banks closed their doors and more than two hundred prominent merchants became bankrupt. Whether in public or in private, indeed, Robinson rarely opened his mouth without—as the Irishman remarked—putting his foot into it. At a dinner-party on one occasion, for example, he sat next to an elderly lady, and for her amusement told her an excellent story concerning Lord North. Lord North, it appeared, some thirty years before, had been dining out. His next-door neighbour had asked him *sotto voce*: “Who is that hideous woman sitting opposite to us?” “That,” had replied Lord North, “is my wife.” “Oh, I do not mean that one,” hastily had said the embarrassed inquirer; “I mean the monster next but one to her.” “Oh, that one,” North had rejoined, “is my daughter.” Robinson noted that the story was not received with the welcome he had expected. Then, too late, he remembered that the lady to whom he was speaking was, under another name, the very daughter of Lord North referred to.

The only reason why Robinson—who had been a peer for only four months—was asked to succeed Canning was that it was thought by the King that he, as Canning’s closest friend, could best keep together the heterogeneous collection of Liberal-Conservatives and Conservative-Whigs that Canning had managed to combine into a Cabinet. He was not strong enough for the task. Furious dissensions broke out among the Ministers concerning the redistribution of offices; serious differences of opinion displayed themselves respecting foreign policy, and in particular concerning the question whether the Battle of Navarino (October 20, 1827) was to be regarded as a matter for congratulation or apology. Goderich went to the King and wept.



The King told him to use his authority; he was Prime Minister. "On the contrary," he replied, "quite the reverse." Finally, when Herries and Huskisson came to hopeless loggerheads over finance, Goderich gave it up. In January, 1828, he went once more in tears to Windsor. George, who had realised his impotence, tried to cheer him up; but he had no hesitation in accepting his resignation. He had been Prime Minister for more than four months; but in that time he had never faced a Parliament.

## CHAPTER IX

### *THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON*

(JANUARY, 1828—NOVEMBER, 1830)

IN the difficult situation caused by the failure of Goderich to rise out of the second class, the King sent for Wellington. The Duke was not primarily a politician; he recognised his own unfitness to manage a Parliament, and he did not want to form a Government. But his watchword was "duty," and, if the King commanded him to take charge of the State, he had nothing to do but obey. In a mood of high self-abnegation and lofty patriotism, therefore, he responded to the summons of his Sovereign. On January 9, 1828, when he went to Windsor, he found George, at noon, still in bed. He was clad in a dirty silk jacket and an extremely greasy nightcap. His mood was one of high hilarity. He opened the conversation with the words, "Arthur, the Cabinet is defunct," and he then proceeded, with a dramatic skill that would have made his fortune on the variety stage, to give a realistic recital of Robinson's lachrymose resignation. It must have been excruciatingly funny, but his solitary auditor was in no humour to appreciate its dramatic excellence.



Nor did the Duke much like being addressed as "Arthur." However, when His Majesty had concluded the performance, he turned to business, secured Wellington's consent to form a Ministry, giving him a free hand except on two points : first, the Catholic question must be left open; secondly, the one person whom Wellington must *not* invite to join him was Lord Grey.

Wellington dutifully set to work, and soon, with the help of Peel, who was his right-hand man throughout, constructed a composite Cabinet. The Whigs, of course, were excluded; Wellington regarded Whigs as but little better than revolutionaries. Canningites (Huskisson, Grant, Palmerston, etc.) and old Tories (Bathurst, Melville, Ellenborough, etc.) shared fairly equally in office. Wellington, however, profoundly disliked and distrusted the Canningites; he thought them little better than Whigs. He transferred to them some of the detestation with which he had regarded their deceased master. They were enthusiastic for Catholic Emancipation; he was vehemently opposed to it. They were zealous advocates of Greek independence; his sympathies were with the harassed Sultan of Turkey, and he spoke of the Battle of Navarino as an "untoward event." On these and on many other matters there was friction in the Cabinet, Huskisson in particular exciting the Duke's disapproval by his opiniatry. The Duke confided his annoyance to Lady Salisbury. "One man in the Cabinet," he said, "wants one thing, and one another. They agree to what I say in the morning, and then in the evening they start with some crotchet that deranges the whole plan. I have not been used to that in the earlier part of my life. I have been accustomed to carry on things in quite a different way. I assembled my officers and laid down my plan, and it was carried into effect without any more words." Wellington viewed politics with the eye of the military man : he could not conceive either an army or a state commanded by a debating society.



Before six months had elapsed the dissensions between the true blues and the Canningites came to a head. The question of the disfranchisement of the borough of East Retford was the issue. Huskisson voted against his colleagues and tendered his resignation. Wellington, with an alacrity and finality that Huskisson thought indecent, accepted it, and declined to allow him to withdraw it. All the other Canningites followed Huskisson into embittered opposition. "What's the meaning of a party," the irate soldier exclaimed, "if they don't follow their leaders? Damn 'em; let 'em go!" They went.

The vacation of the office of President of the Board of Trade by Charles Grant, and the appointment of Vesey Fitzgerald to succeed him (June, 1828), involved a by-election in County Clare, Ireland. Daniel O'Connell, although as a Catholic disqualified to sit in Parliament, stood against Fitzgerald and was elected by an overwhelming majority. This election brought the long-postponed issue of Catholic Emancipation fairly and squarely before the country. The Irish Catholics were prepared to support O'Connell by force of arms. Wellington had to choose between civil war and concession. Again viewing the political situation with a military eye, he decided that the ultra-Protestant position was untenable and that he must evacuate it. He would yield almost anything, he said, rather than have one month of civil war. Peel concurred. Hence the two of them, to the amazement of the country and the dismay of their followers, formulated and carried the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829—a measure of which both of them, as they freely continued to admit, strongly disapproved.

The emancipation of the Catholics immediately precipitated the even larger problem of Parliamentary reform. The Whigs, led by Grey in the House of Lords and by Russell in the House of Commons, began to bring in comprehensive proposals for the enfranchise-



ment of the middle class and for the redistribution of seats. Wellington and Peel strenuously resisted and protested. The country, however, as shown in a hotly contested election in 1830, was against them, and in November they resigned.

## CHAPTER X

## EARL GREY

(NOVEMBER, 1830—JULY, 1834)

THE Canningites, largely owing to their quarrel with Wellington, had by this time become definitely converted to moderate Parliamentary reform. On Wellington's resignation, therefore, they were able to join with the Whigs to form a coalition Cabinet under George IV.'s *bête noir*, Earl Grey. George IV., however, had passed away, not deeply lamented, the preceding June, his place being taken by the more liberal and more negligible William IV. The Canningites, moreover, had lost their leader, Huskisson, who had perished tragically by accident at the opening of the Liverpool-Manchester Railway on September 15. Of the remainder, Palmerston began his great career at the Foreign Office; Melbourne took the Home Office; Goderich the Colonial Office; while Charles Grant was placed over the Board of Control. The Whigs, however, as the older champions of Parliamentary reform, had pride of place. Grey was Prime Minister, Althorp Chancellor of the Exchequer, Brougham Lord Chancellor, Russell Paymaster-General, and Stanley Chief Secretary for Ireland.

The new Prime Minister—the first true Whig to hold that position since Rockingham's death in 1782—was a man whose public life had been largely devoted to the advocacy of Parliamentary reform. Born 1764—



that is, five years before Wellington—son of Colonel Grey, of Falloden, in Northumberland, a notable soldier who late in life was raised to the Peerage as Earl Grey, Charles Grey entered the House of Commons in 1786 as Member for his native county. He attached himself to Charles James Fox, and soon signalled himself by the vehemence and frequency with which he assailed Pitt. He was an excellent speaker, and as such he was admitted to that band of select Whig orators who were permitted for six years to build up their reputations as declaimers by attacking Warren Hastings in Westminster Hall. When the French Revolution broke out he followed Fox and the Radicals in welcoming and applauding it. He helped to found the Society of the Friends of the People (1792), and he strongly opposed the war (1793). In 1797—of all dates in English history one of the least appropriate—he introduced his first Bill for Parliamentary reform. It was, of course, emphatically rejected. But from that time on he never ceased to press the question upon his colleagues. In 1806-7, under Grenville, he had his first brief experience of office. To begin with, he was First Lord of the Admiralty; but on Fox's death in September, 1806, he succeeded his old master and friend at the Foreign Office. He strongly supported Grenville in his proposals for Catholic relief, and, when these proposals were rejected by the King, he, with Grenville, resigned office. The same year (1807) he succeeded to the Peerage. Twenty-five years elapsed before he again held office. He was sixty-six years old when he was called to form a Cabinet.

The one great task of Earl Grey was to carry a comprehensive measure of Parliamentary reform. This task he accomplished during the years 1830-32. Into the details of the struggle over the Reform Bill it is, of course, impossible for us to enter. Suffice it to say that the first Bill was defeated in the Commons (April, 1831); that Parliament was then dissolved, and that the



new House of Commons contained a majority decisively pledged to reform; that the second Reform Bill easily passed the Commons, but was thrown out by the Lords (October, 1831); that, amid intense popular excitement, the third Bill was carried through the Commons (March, 1832) and sent up to the House of Peers; that the attempts of the Lords to amend the measure caused Grey to resign; that Wellington failed to constitute an anti-reform Ministry; that Grey came back with a pledge from the King to create as many peers as might be necessary to carry the measure; that in these circumstances Wellington withdrew his followers from the fray and allowed the Bill to become law (June, 1832).

The General Election that followed the passing of the Reform Act gave the Whigs and Radicals a large majority in the Commons. The spirit of reform was in the air. Within two brief years the Government abolished slavery throughout the Empire; made the first annual grant in aid of national education; carried the earliest effective Factory Act; and introduced a new and stringent, but sound and necessary, system of Poor Law administration.

Ireland, as was so often the case during the nineteenth century, proved to be the undoing of the reform Cabinet. The Ministry split on a Coercion Bill, and Grey resigned on July 9, 1834.

## CHAPTER XI

### *VISCOUNT MELBOURNE—I*

(JULY—NOVEMBER, 1834)

At the time when Grey resigned, both the Whigs and the Tories were more afraid of the Radicals than of one another. The Tories hoped there would be no more



change; the Whigs considered that there was no need for much more. The Radicals, on the other hand, maintained that the period of transition from oligarchy to democracy had only just begun; they regarded the Reform Act of 1832 as merely the prolegomena to the revolution.

King William IV., thoroughly perturbed at the way things were going, thought that Grey's resignation provided an opportunity for constructing an anti-Radical Ministry on a broad basis. He therefore sent for the Canningite Melbourne, who had been Home Secretary in Grey's administration, and begged him to make an alliance with Wellington and Peel on the one hand, and with Stanley and the more Conservative Whigs on the other. Melbourne tried, in a half-hearted manner, and totally failed. Hence he had to content himself with a slight reshufflement and still slighter reinforcement of Grey's Ministry.

Melbourne's Government, therefore, suffered from what Hobbes used to call "imperfect institution": it was rickety from the start. The King was disappointed in it; the Tories distrusted it; the Whigs were doubtful about it; the Radicals detested it; the country felt no interest in it. The Prime Minister, William Lamb, second Viscount Melbourne, was not a politician to excite enthusiasm. Born 1779, he had not entered Parliament until he was twenty-seven, and not till he was forty-eight had he attained to office. Then, in 1827, he had become Chief Secretary for Ireland to his friend and leader, Canning. He had continued in office under Goderich, and had even consented to serve for a short time under Wellington; but from Wellington's Cabinet he had resigned in company with Huskisson. In 1830 he joined Grey, although he regarded the Reform Bill as a necessary evil rather than a positive good. He was a dilettante politician, although personally a delightful man. He had great natural powers of intellect, and he was a wide reader; but his strength lay in his social



charm. He became Prime Minister because everyone liked him and no one was jealous of him. He lacked seriousness and energy, however, and under him Ministers went their own way or did nothing, as their temperaments led them. As a Prime Minister his main virtue, apart from that easy-going urbanity which kept his Cabinet together, was that he understood better than any of his predecessors had done the principles and the practice of Parliamentary government.

For four months the Melbourne Ministry marked time, and then (November, 1834) it lost its leader in the House of Commons—viz., Lord Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer—who was called to the House of Lords through the death of his father, Earl Spencer. Melbourne went to consult the King concerning the necessary reconstruction of the Cabinet, and suggested Lord John Russell as Althorp's successor. The King, who regarded Russell with extreme disfavour, refused to accept the suggestion, and intimated his wish to confer with the Duke of Wellington on the matter. Melbourne, with a complacency that was not shared by his colleagues, concurred, and himself obligingly conveyed the King's message to the astonished Duke.

## CHAPTER XII

### *SIR ROBERT PEEL—I*

(DECEMBER, 1834—APRIL, 1835)

IF Melbourne was sincerely glad to be relieved of office, Wellington was firmly determined to avoid, if possible, the taking of it up again. He had had more than enough experience of commanding people who would not obey and could not be court-martialled for insubordination. When, therefore, the Duke had his



audience with the King, he argued strongly that the Prime Minister should be in the House of Commons, and advised him to send for Sir Robert Peel. William accepted the advice. Peel, however, was in Italy on holiday at the time, and in those days of slow travel and imperfect communication he could hardly be fetched back to England in less than a month. Wellington, with his supreme devotion to duty, agreed to carry on the Government till Peel's return. At an immense sacrifice of leisure and energy, but, owing to the absence of argumentation and disobedience, with complete satisfaction, Wellington acted as a Cabinet from the middle of November to the middle of December. Then Peel arrived from Rome and constructed a Ministry in which Wellington limited himself to the Secretariat for Foreign Affairs.

Never since 1783, when George III. had dismissed Fox and North and had summoned the young Pitt to form a Government, had a change of administration been so patently due to the caprice of the King and not to the will of the people. Would the people confirm the King's action in 1835 as they had done in 1784? The hotly contested election of January, 1835, gave an emphatically negative answer. In vain did Peel seek to win moderate Whig support by issuing his famous "Tamworth Manifesto," which became the charter of a new Conservatism. When the results of the poll were declared he found himself in a minority of 107. In Parliament, when it assembled, he was attacked with relentless fury by the microscopic but venomous Lord John Russell and by the rest of the outraged Whig majority. After a few miserable weeks Peel was defeated on an Irish Church Revenue Bill and compelled to resign (April 7). For six more years he had to wait before attaining office together with power.

This episode of 1834-35 was important in British constitutional history, first, as establishing firmly the principle that, in the matter of appointing and dis-



missing Ministers, the royal function is merely formal and not actively efficient; and, secondly, in providing Sir Robert Peel with an opportunity for promulgating a manifesto which marked a new stage in the history of Toryism.

Peel belonged to a rather lower grade of the middle class than that from which Addington—the first bourgeois Premier—had sprung. His grandfather had been a yeoman-farmer; his father was a cotton-spinner. His father, however, had made money, had entered Parliament, had won a baronetcy by devotion to Pitt, and had dedicated his eldest son—born 1788—to politics. The son had had a distinguished career at Harrow and at Oxford, had become a Member of Parliament in 1809, had attained to minor office in 1810, and had actually been appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1812—*i.e.*, at the age of twenty-four. For six years he had administered Ireland with a strong and just hand, although his avowed antagonism to Catholic Emancipation had won him the nickname of “Orange Peel.” On his return to England he had gained distinction as chairman of the committee that recommended the restoration of the gold standard of currency in 1815. Three years later he had succeeded Sidmouth as Home Secretary, and in that capacity had carried through a series of reforms that made his Ministry memorable—in particular, the mitigation of the criminal code and the institution of a police force for London. As leader of the House of Commons under Wellington (1828-30) he had shared with his chief the odium, first, of resisting Catholic Emancipation, and, secondly, of sacrificing his convictions on the altar of expediency. With Wellington, too, he had, to the end, fought against the Reform Bills of 1831-32.

Peel, however, was not—like Eldon or Sidmouth—a mere diehard. He, at any rate, recognised that, when such measures as those of 1829 and 1832 had been passed, there could be no going back on them. He also



realised that, if Toryism was to recover from the shattering blows of those disastrous years, it could only be by winning over the great middle class, into whose hands, for the time, political power had descended. The Tamworth Manifesto was the document in which, by means of a frank acceptance of the *status quo*, and a detailed programme of financial and commercial reconstruction, he sought to woo the new electorate. The manifesto came too late to determine the result of the 1835 election. During the next six years, however, its leaven worked, and when, at the end of that time, the electors once again had a chance to make their opinions felt, they gave him an emphatic mandate to govern. He had created the new Conservative party.

## CHAPTER XIII

### VISCOUNT MELBOURNE—II

(APRIL, 1835—AUGUST, 1841)

THE resignation of Peel in April, 1835, brought the debonair Melbourne back to power. With him came the festive Palmerston to the Foreign Office, the belligerent Russell to the Home Office, and a number of smaller fry, Whig and Canningite. It was, on the whole, an undistinguished Ministry, but it did some good work. It passed the admirable Municipal Corporations Act (1835); it effected the commutation of Irish tithes (1836); it enlarged the freedom of the Press by lowering the stamp duties (1836); it instituted the penny post and established the education department of the Home Office (1839); it settled a serious agitation in Canada by a generous grant of self-government (1840); it effected a reform of the excessively corrupt Irish boroughs (1840); it dealt faithfully with Mehemet Ali of Egypt, and, with a diplomacy of incomparable skill,



steered both Britain and the Continent clear of a general Turkish war (1840).

It was faced, however, by a great deal of formidable disaffection at home. On the one hand, the labouring class, disappointed at the effect of the Reform Act and infuriated by the consequences of the new Poor Law, organised themselves under such leaders as William Lovett and Fergus O'Connor, and started the agitation for the Charter. On the other hand, the manufacturing middle class, eager to lower their costs of production, to extend their markets, and to improve the condition of their workpeople, began, under Richard Cobden and his colleagues, to clamour for the repeal of the Corn Laws and for the general freedom of trade. The Cabinet was torn by dissensions respecting both democracy and fiscal policy.

One circumstance, however, in 1837, greatly strengthened Melbourne's position and undoubtedly extended the term of his power. In that year (June 20) William IV., who had never liked or trusted him, died. The crown passed to Victoria, daughter of William's younger brother, Edward, Duke of Kent, fourth son of George III. The young Queen, who had only just passed her eighteenth birthday, found in Melbourne a friend and adviser of infinite consideration and charm. A relationship almost like that of father and daughter sprang up between the two; Melbourne's character, hitherto somewhat slack and cynical, was energised and purified by his new responsibilities; the Queen, on her side, received from the wise old worldling lessons in the nature and operation of constitutional monarchy that were of incalculable value to her all her reign.

That the Queen needed such lessons was manifested in 1839 by the curious "bedchamber" controversy that for some weeks agitated the political world. In the spring of that year Melbourne's majority in the House of Commons sank to so low a figure that in May he felt it best to resign. The Queen, having said farewell



to him with undisguised regret, sent for Peel, whose stiff and awkward manners proved to be most displeasing to her. Peel formed a Cabinet that she accepted without enthusiasm; but, in addition to the changes in the Government that he imposed upon her, he demanded a change in the leading ladies of the bed-chamber. He could not, he said, have in constant attendance on the Queen such relatives of his inveterate political opponents as the sister of Lord Morpeth and the wife of Lord Normanby. The Queen refused to dismiss them; Peel declined to serve as Prime Minister so long as they continued in attendance; Melbourne and his deceased Cabinet were disinterred and resuscitated. For two more years they lingered, half corpse and half ghost, in this sublunary sphere. Then, on June 4, 1841, Peel carried against them a direct vote of no confidence. They appealed to the country. The country declared decisively against them. They met the new Parliament at the end of August, were at once defeated, and driven to resign.

A second time the Queen said good-bye to Melbourne. Again she did so with gratitude and regret. But she no longer sorrowed without hope. For the Prince Consort had come upon the scene (1840), and Albert Edward was soon to follow (November 9, 1841).

## CHAPTER XIV

### *SIR ROBERT PEEL—II*

(SEPTEMBER, 1841—JUNE, 1846)

THE Prince Consort from the first appreciated Peel. His sobriety, his sincere religiousness, his solid abilities, his immense diligence, his high business capacity, his domestic respectability, his unbending rectitude, his genuine devotion to the good of the nation—these and



other kindred qualities commended him to the grave and pious German whom the Queen had chosen to be her husband. The Prince's approval melted Victoria's icy dislike, and she, too, came to appreciate the many merits of her new Prime Minister. Under the genial rays of the royal recognition Peel's rigidity was reduced, and before long quite cordial relations were established between monarch and minister.

Peel's Government was essentially a business Government. Peel brought to it the instincts and the interests of the manufacturing middle class. And Peel dominated the Cabinet as no Prime Minister—not even Walpole and Pitt before him, or Gladstone and Disraeli after him—ever dominated it. It contained able men—*e.g.*, Wellington, Lyndhurst, Ellenborough, and two notable ex-Whigs, Stanley and Graham; but all of them were mere heads of departments, supervised and controlled by a masterful and extremely competent chief.

Peel's first great achievement was his notable Free Trade Budget of 1842—a Budget in which he reduced the duties on imported corn, lowered the tariffs on 750 manufactured articles, and made up for the entailed loss to the revenue by an income-tax of 7d. in the pound on incomes of £150 and over. In 1845 he made still further reductions on import duties, relieving in particular raw materials and articles of general consumption, such as sugar. Another of his notable achievements—the one on which he always prided himself most—was the Bank Charter Act of 1844, inspired by that great financier, Lord Overstone. He tried to conciliate Ireland by increasing the Government grant to the Catholic Maynooth College. He wholly failed in his purpose, but he succeeded in alienating a large number of his Protestant supporters. Finally, he had to face the problem of the total repeal of the Corn Laws. The matter was brought to an issue in 1845 by the victorious campaign of Cobden and his Anti-Corn Law



League, by the Irish potato famine—which was really totally irrelevant—and by Lord John Russell's declaration in favour of repeal in November. Peel, although deeply pledged to Protection, had become convinced by the arguments of Cobden. When, therefore, he realised that he could no longer defend the Corn Laws, and when he failed to convert the majority of his Cabinet to repeal, he resigned (December, 1845).

The Queen summoned Russell to form a Free Trade administration. But Russell had no desire to be the head of a minority Government which would be assailed in front by a solid phalanx of angry Protectionists led by Bentinck and Disraeli, and inconvenienced in the rear by a belligerent band of aggressive Cobdenites whose cosmopolitanism, pacificism, republicanism, and general radicalism filled Russell with loathing and alarm. He therefore sought diligently for some way of escape, and found it in Palmerston's refusal to take any office except the Foreign Office and Grey's refusal to take any office if Palmerston held the Foreign Office. Palmerston may have been inevitable, but Grey certainly was not. The excuse, however, served. Russell revoked, and the Queen sent for Peel again.

Peel made the second and greatest mistake in his life in coming back; it was a greater mistake than the one he had made in 1829, when he betrayed his party in the matter of Catholic Emancipation. True, in 1846 he had the excuse that he had changed his views—an excuse that was not available sixteen years before. Nevertheless, he had been sent to Parliament as a protector of the agricultural interest; he had defended the Corn Laws in a series of speeches that had completely identified him with the cause of "the gentlemen of England"; he was the trusted leader and representative of the old rural communities of the counties as against the new encroaching proletariat of the towns. He had put himself in a false position, for his heart was always



with the manufacturing class, to which he belonged. As Bentinck and Disraeli told him, without any ambiguity of language, he had played the part of Judas. If the Corn Laws had to be repealed, it was not for him or for Lord John Russell, but for Richard Cobden, to repeal them.

In spite, however, of ferocious attacks that stung him to the quick, Peel persisted in his course. Stanley and the bulk of the Conservative party repudiated him and sought other leaders. Nevertheless, at the head of a pitiful remnant, with the aid of complacent Whigs and triumphant Radicals—a curious, motley host—he got his way. The Corn Laws were repealed on June 25, 1846. That very same day his enemies, who had been lying in wait for him, had their revenge by defeating him in the House of Commons on an Irish Coercion Bill. He at once resigned. Never again did he hold office. He remained a lonely figure, reprobated by the Radicals as a coercionist, by the Whigs as an opponent of religious freedom and Parliamentary reform, and by the Tories as a betrayer of the landed interest. But the Queen respected him, the Prince Consort admired him, and Mr. W. E. Gladstone professed himself his disciple.

## CHAPTER XV

### *LORD JOHN RUSSELL—I*

(JULY, 1846—FEBRUARY, 1852)

SIR ROBERT PEEL in 1846 rendered to his country the great disservice of breaking up the Conservative party—a disservice similar to that which Mr. Gladstone rendered in respect of the Liberal party in 1885, and to that which Mr. Chamberlain rendered in respect of the Unionist party in 1903. Since organised party is—with all its defects—the indispensable instrument of demo-



cratic government, a politician who wrecks a party is doing a deed the evil effects of which can rarely be counter-balanced by any alleged good; he is inevitably inaugurating a long period of electoral and Parliamentary chaos. In the case under review, some twenty-five years of confusion ensued from Peel's action in 1846. Not until Disraeli had completely reconstituted Conservatism, and not until Gladstone had entirely conveyed himself and his fellow-Peelites over to Liberalism, did order and consistency re-establish themselves in British politics.

The resignation of Peel made it necessary for the Queen to send once more for Lord John Russell. This time he had no desire to evade office. The clearing of the Corn Law business out of the way had left the road open for a good deal of overdue social and economic reform. He got together a Cabinet in which Grey consented to serve with Palmerston, together with a number of worthy but long-forgotten Whigs. Russell and Palmerston were the outstanding figures of the Ministry, and they by no means saw eye to eye with one another. Palmerston was the older man; he had been born in 1784 and he had sat in Parliament continuously since 1807. He had drifted from the high Toryism of Perceval and Liverpool into the assorted Liberalism of Russell's Cabinet by way of Canningism. He always had been, he was, and he always remained, a thorough Conservative at heart. Russell, on the other hand, a belligerent little wasp, was an ingrained Progressive. Born in 1792, the third son of the sixth Duke of Bedford, he had entered Parliament in 1813 as an avowed disciple of Charles James Fox. He had ardently advocated Catholic Emancipation; he had led the fight for the Reform Bill in the House of Commons; he had been prominent in every movement that had had as its object the reduction of privilege, the abolition of monopoly, the extension of individual liberty.

The six years during which Russell was Prime



Minister for the first time were by no means a period of unmixed felicity. Abroad there was much tribulation. In particular, in 1848, when in every direction thrones were tumbling down, all Palmerston's skill and resource were taxed to keep the Continent at peace. At home, also in 1848, the menace of a Chartist revolution, and the actual incidence of an Irish rebellion, caused the gravest anxiety and alarm. In India troubles on the North-West Frontier ended in the Sikh War and the annexation of the Punjab (1849). Dissensions respecting a Franchise Bill in February, 1851, actually brought the Government down; but Stanley's failure to provide an alternative Cabinet enabled Russell to set Humpty-Dumpty up again. In December of the same year a violent quarrel between Palmerston and the Court respecting the attitude of this country to Louis Napoleon, who had just effected his *coup d'état*, compelled Russell to dismiss his insubordinate and obnoxious—yet indispensable—Foreign Minister. Early in 1852 Palmerston had his "tit-for-tat with Johnny Russell": he secured his defeat on a Militia Bill and so drove him from office.

The futility of these personal and political wrangles was to some extent redeemed by a useful Factory Act in 1847, and by the repeal of the antiquated Navigation Acts in 1849.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE EARL OF DERBY—I

(FEBRUARY—DECEMBER, 1852)

THE fall of Russell's Whig Ministry in February, 1852, brought the Protectionist main body of the Tories into power under their champions Stanley and Disraeli. Of Disraeli we shall have to say more anon. Suffice it here to note that in this Ministry he held the first office that



had ever fallen to his lot, although he had been in Parliament for fifteen years, and that that office was none other than the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, coupled with the leadership of the House of Commons. To Stanley we must now turn our attention, and he was undoubtedly one of the most interesting men of the century—a man who, if he had not been cursed by high rank and excessive wealth, might have made an enduring name and have conferred permanent benefit upon his country. As it was, his lack of system and seriousness, coupled with the dissipation of his interests and energies over many fields of culture and of sport, rendered him a hopeless amateur in politics, a mere meddler and muddler, the chief result of whose long continuance in public life was to block the path of his great lieutenant, Disraeli, to independent power.

Edward Stanley, eldest son of the Lord Stanley who in 1834 became thirteenth Earl of Derby, was born in 1799 and elected a Member of Parliament in 1820. He was then and till 1834 an advanced Whig, who supported with marked ability such measures as Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary reform, and the abolition of slavery. He showed peculiar skill in controversy, and his fiery replies to his antagonists in the House of Commons won for him the nickname of "the Rupert of debate." In Grey's Ministry, 1830, he held the post of Chief Secretary for Ireland, and in this post his stern enforcement of law and order, and his fierce oratorical bouts with Daniel O'Connell, gave the first indications of his nascent Conservatism. He finally broke with the Whigs in 1834 over their proposal to use the surplus revenues of the Protestant Church of Ireland for secular purposes.

For seven years (1834-41) he remained a free-lance in politics, at the head of a small third party, which came to be known—after an epithet in Canning's *Loves of the Triangles*—as the "Derby Dillies." More and more he and his little company, who were capable of



making themselves a great nuisance in Parliament, inclined to Conservatism, and in 1841, to the general relief, they consented to range themselves under Sir Robert Peel's banner. Stanley became Secretary of State for the Colonies, and his faithful Sancho Panza, Sir James Graham, Secretary for Home Affairs. Stanley, however, could never be trusted either to follow his leaders or to lead his followers, and in 1846 he deserted Sir Robert Peel at the crisis of the Corn Law conflict. It was too much to expect a man of his intelligence to achieve under pressure a sudden conversion to the principles of Free Trade; it was equally too much to suppose that a man of his position and independence would smother his convictions and bow to the will of a dictator. In deserting Peel, however, he lost the services of Graham, and Benjamin Disraeli had to be taken on in his room. In 1834, Stanley had acquired the courtesy title of "Lord," on his father's succession to the family earldom; in 1844, under the same title, he had been raised to the Peerage in order to strengthen the Government's debating power in the Upper House; in 1851 he had become, by his father's death, the fourteenth Earl of Derby.

Concerning Derby's first Premiership, which endured but ten months, not much need be said. The Conservative Government never had a majority in the House of Commons, its effort to secure one in an August election proving a failure. It managed to retain office for a brief period of impotence and humiliation only by avowing its abandonment of any intention to reimpose the Corn Laws, and only because of the dissensions in the ranks of its opponents—Peelites, Palmerstonians, Russellites, Cobdenites, etc. With the aid of the Palmerstonians and the support of the venerable Duke of Wellington, who made his last speech in the House of Lords on the occasion, it carried a Militia Bill, to take the place of the measure on which Russell had come to grief. The Peelites, however, led by the



implacable Gladstone, pursued the Ministry with relentless hostility. Their chance of revenge came in December, when Disraeli brought in his Budget. Gladstone, who could never distinguish between his passions and his conscience, tore the Budget to shreds with fervid skill. On December 18 the Budget was rejected, and the Government resigned.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *THE EARL OF ABERDEEN*

(DECEMBER, 1852—FEBRUARY, 1855)

THE Conservative Ministry of Derby had been overthrown by a coalition of Peelites and Whigs, and this coalition was now called to power under the Peelite Earl of Aberdeen. This worthy but woolly man was a veteran in politics. Born the same year as Palmerston (1784) and educated with him at Harrow, his main function in life had been to oppose Palmerston in the sphere of foreign affairs, and soothe the Continental susceptibilities that Palmerston so frequently irritated. Palmerston characterised Aberdeen's diplomacy by the epithet "antiquated imbecility."

The poor old gentleman had begun his public life more than half a century before, when he had accompanied Cornwallis to Paris to negotiate the Peace of Amiens (1801). He had never sat in the House of Commons, but had entered Parliament in 1806 as a representative peer of Scotland. He had served under Wellington (1828-30) and under Peel (1841-46) as Secretary for Foreign Affairs. His support had been given to Peel in the matter of the Corn Laws, and after Peel's death in 1850 he had been recognised, by reason of his age and respectability, as the official chief of the Peelite section of the Conservatives.



The composite Government which in 1852 he was called upon to lead was a failure from the first. Disraeli, in his farewell speech in December, had pointed out some of its prospective weaknesses, and had remarked with prophetic insight that England did not love coalitions. The Whigs were thoroughly dissatisfied with the share of power assigned to them, Lord John Russell, in particular, being obviously and indecently eager to oust Aberdeen from the Premiership and reconstruct the Ministry on more liberal lines. There were violent dissensions among Ministers concerning most of the prominent questions of the day, even before problems of foreign politics split them into half a dozen wrangling groups. Lord John Russell, above all others, kept the Cabinet in a state of constant turmoil by his mania for propounding schemes of Parliamentary reform, which Palmerston detested almost as much as did Aberdeen.

The one conspicuous triumph of the coalition was Gladstone's Budget of 1853. It was framed on true Peelite lines. It abolished import duties on 124 articles, and lowered them on 133 more; it formulated a plan, according to which the income-tax, most obnoxious of all the inquisitorial devices ever invented by publicans or sinners, should be gradually eliminated within seven years; it extended the legacy duty to include all successions, whether they consisted of real or of personal property. This Budget was a great achievement, and, together with the five-hour speech in which it was laid before the House of Commons, it firmly established Gladstone's reputation as a financier of the first rank.

Before ever this Budget became law, however, the clouds of war had begun to gather in the East. A dispute had arisen in Jerusalem between the Greek priests and the Roman priests concerning the custody and the service of the holy places. Russia, as protector of the Greek Church, and France, as guardian of the rights of the Catholic Church, had become involved in the



brawl. Aberdeen, who was a personal friend of Nicholas I. of Russia and an unfriendly critic of Napoleon III. of France, was torn between his desire to be kind to the Tsar and his consciousness that it was his duty to prevent any extension of Russian influence in the Near East. The result of his vacillation, his shilly-shallying, his incoherent ramblings, and his indecisive actions, was that the country, by insensible degrees, drifted into a war which no one wanted, for which there was no necessity whatsoever, and of which none had a greater horror than Aberdeen himself. One week of Palmerston at the Foreign Office would have cleared the air and kept the peace. The Crimean War, in so far as Britain was implicated in it, was the nemesis of Aberdeen's muddle-headedness and feebleness, his mumbling and fumbling.

The war having broken out in March, 1854, its conduct showed the same gross incompetence as had marked the diplomacy that precipitated it. The country became angry and alarmed as it heard of futile expeditions, fruitless battles, heavy casualties, wasted stores, neglected armies, and fever-stricken hospitals. Russell greatly complicated Aberdeen's difficulties by seizing the occasion to introduce a highly controversial measure of Parliamentary reform, which rent the already distracted Cabinet into furious factions.

Finally, in January, 1855, a motion was carried in the House of Commons to the effect that a committee should be appointed "to inquire into the condition of our army before Sebastopol, and into the conduct of those departments of the Government whose duty it has been to minister to the wants of that army." A two days' debate on the motion revealed an appalling state of muddle and misery. So profoundly was the House of Commons stirred by the scandalous exposure that it passed the vote of censure on the guilty Government by 305 to 148 votes. Russell had anticipated the verdict by resigning. Aberdeen followed suit on



February 1. The scattered members of the unhappy coalition completed the rout by openly accusing one another of incompetence and treachery.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### VISCOUNT PALMERSTON—I

(FEBRUARY, 1855—FEBRUARY, 1858)

IF the country had loudly called for the resignation of the amiable but incapable Aberdeen, not less emphatically did it cry for the elevation of the one man who was considered able to cope with the difficulties of the situation—to wit, Palmerston. That one man, however, was precisely the person most obnoxious to the Queen and the Prince Consort, and for nearly a week they struggled against the necessity of sending for him. First, Lord Derby was asked to form a Ministry. He sounded Palmerston and the Peelites, but he could make nothing of them. They held out hopes of rendering him “independent support,” but “independent,” he informed the Queen, meant, in his opinion, “not to be depended on.” Hence—to Disraeli’s deep disappointment and disgust—he made *il gran rifiuto*. Then the Queen sent for that aged and venerable Whig, Lord Lansdowne, but he said that his whole time and his complete attention were occupied in fighting a war in his own members, caused by an invasion of the gout. He therefore advised the Queen to summon Lord John Russell, not because either he or the Queen wanted that troublesome little pest as a Prime Minister, but because he realised that, unless he were allowed to make the attempt to construct a Cabinet—an attempt which Lansdowne rightly foresaw would be doomed to failure—he would never let any-one else perform the task in peace. Russell, accordingly,



was invited to take the office for which he had so long intrigued and fought. He accepted the invitation with alacrity, and set to work with the zeal of a busy bee to form his Ministry. To his immense surprise and intense annoyance, not a single one of his old colleagues would consent to serve under him. That revelation of what they thought of him, and how they regarded his recent antics, sufficed to sober him and teach him a lesson. He subsided and left the way clear for Palmerston.

By this time the Queen saw that Palmerston was the inevitable man, and, with the best grace possible in the circumstances, she sent for him. He was a man singularly free from either embarrassment or resentment, and, although he was under no illusions as to the dislike with which he was regarded at Court, he came with ready cheerfulness to clear up Aberdeen's mess.

Henry Temple, third Viscount Palmerston (in the Irish Peerage) was, as we have already remarked, of the same age as Aberdeen. That is to say, he was born in 1784, and was therefore seventy-one years of age when he was called upon to govern an empire and conduct a war. But, whereas Aberdeen was old beyond his years, Palmerston remained for ever young and buoyant. He was a perennially juvenile Peter Pan. For nearly fifty years he had been in the House of Commons. During a period of almost twenty years (1809-28), under successive Tory Governments, he had held the modest office of Secretary-at-War. Towards the end of this time he had attached himself to Canning; with the other Canningites he had left Wellington's Ministry in 1828, and with them he had joined Grey in 1830. Though from that date onward he always worked with the Whigs, he never became a Whig, still less a Liberal. He was Conservatism incarnate, and as such he gave Disraeli a lot of trouble. For Disraeli did not know what in his policy to criticise or oppose.

He made his great reputation as Minister for Foreign



Affairs under Grey, Melbourne, and Russell. To him, more than to any other single human being, were due the establishment of Belgian independence, the overthrow of Mehemet Ali, and the peaceful termination of the revolutionary movements of 1848-52. His assertion of British influence, his maintenance of British prestige, his conservation of British interests abroad, touched the imagination of the British people, and he gradually acquired an immense popularity. His triumph in the Don Pacifico debate of 1850, against the combined oratory of Peel, Gladstone, Disraeli, and Cobden, marked the acme of his fame. From that time onward, throughout his long life, he was the darling of the Jingoës, the despair of the Radicals, and the *bête noir* of Mr. Gladstone, who had to sit silent in his Cabinets waiting for him to die.

The war, fortunately, did not occupy Palmerston's attention for long. His assumption of office synchronised with a turn for the better in the affairs of the Crimea. In September, 1855, Sebastopol fell, and in March, 1856, the Peace of Paris was concluded. But, even when this unhappy business was satisfactorily settled, overseas concerns continued to demand the greater part of the time and care of Palmerston and his colleagues. A war with China respecting the seizure of the lorcha *Arrow*; a war with Persia caused by the intrigues of Russia and the Persian occupation of Herat; and, finally, the Indian Mutiny of 1857, kept the Cabinet busy with the problems of Asia.

It was a European complication, however, that brought his Government down at the beginning of 1858. On January 14 of that year an Italian, Felix Orsini, dissatisfied with the support that Napoleon III. gave to the movement for national independence in Italy, strove to stimulate the Emperor's zeal by means of a bomb which was exploded in the vicinity of his carriage. The plot was hatched and the bomb manufactured, so it appeared, in London, and the French



Government made a strong demand, in still stronger language, that a more effective control over foreign conspirators should be exercised by the London police. This demand Palmerston felt to be reasonable, and he accordingly introduced into Parliament a Conspiracy to Murder Bill. This measure, no doubt, would have become law without much controversy in normal circumstances. But during the preceding four weeks (January 14–February 14) the French Press had contained many violent attacks on England as the eternal enemy of France, and some demands, from highly placed officers, for war with the perfidious inhabitants of “that land of iniquity which contains the haunts of the monsters who are sheltered by its laws.” This from our recent allies in the Crimean War so deeply offended both the people and the Parliament of Britain that, when the Conspiracy to Murder Bill was brought in, it was rejected by 234 votes to 215. Palmerston at once resigned (February 19, 1858).

## CHAPTER XIX

### *THE EARL OF DERBY—II*

(FEBRUARY, 1858—MAY, 1859)

ON the resignation of Palmerston the Queen at once summoned Lord Derby to form a Conservative Ministry. This time, although without enthusiasm—since the systematic pursuit of politics interfered with concentration on horse-racing, and interrupted work on the serious business of translating Homer—he consented to do so. He made a valiant effort to win the Peelites in general, and Gladstone in particular, back to the Conservative fold. But he had thrown away his chance three years before. In the interval the Peelites, a dwindling band of some thirty members, had moved



decisively in the direction of Liberalism. Gladstone, moreover, had clearly realised that never again could he by any possibility sit in the same Cabinet, or on the same side of the House of Commons, as Disraeli. Hence, in impatient isolation as the chief of an insignificant third party in process of transmigration, he waited until such time as Derby should be defeated and Palmerston dead. Meantime he did all that was possible to a sincere Christian to hasten the day of his ascent to supremacy.

But, although the Peelites were but a small company, in the then state of parties they sufficed to turn the scale in Parliament decisively against the new Government. Once more, then, in 1858 as in 1852, Disraeli—again Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons—had to face the difficult task of keeping a minority from defeat. In the circumstances he could do little more than carry a number of non-controversial measures concerning which all parties were more or less in accord. For some fifteen months, then, the Government did useful donkey-work. It brought to an end the turmoil in India caused by the Mutiny by passing a Government of India Bill, transferring all the powers and properties of the East India Company to the Crown (1858); it ended the China War by the Treaty of Tientsin (1858); it utilised the alarm generated by the fulminations of the French fire-eaters after the Orsini plot to establish the patriotic force of the Volunteers for the defence of Britain in case of invasion. With less general consent, and rather by the aid of the Whigs than by the willing support of his normal followers, Disraeli secured such a modification of the Parliamentary oaths as would admit Jews to either House of the Legislature (1858). Finally, early in 1859, Disraeli ventured upon the thorny path of Parliamentary reform. He had long realised that something would have to be done by someone. Russell had so stirred the proletarian waters



that they could be calmed by nothing less than large concession. He feared that concessions made by Russell and the Radicals would be unnecessarily big. He therefore thought it best to see if he could restore tranquillity by means of a modest extension of the franchise to respectable people, and a slight redistribution of seats. His mild proposals were sufficient to drive some of the more timorous Tories (Henley and Walpole) from the Cabinet; but they were not enough to satisfy either Parliament or people. In the House of Commons Russell, on April 1, 1859, carried an amendment against the Government, which caused Lord Derby to advise the Queen to dissolve Parliament. The result of the General Election, which was fought on the reform question, resulted in the return of 348 Liberals as against 305 Conservatives. On the assembly of the new Parliament, an amendment to the Address was moved by the Marquis of Hartington, and was carried by a majority of thirteen. Derby at once resigned (May, 1859).

## CHAPTER XX

### *VISCOUNT PALMERSTON—II*

(JUNE, 1859—OCTOBER, 1865)

ON the resignation of Lord Derby in May, 1859, the Queen did not send for either of those "dreadful old men" Russell or Palmerston. She sent for the urbane and estimable Lord Granville, whose courtly pliability promised more domestic peace than either the masterful independence of Palmerston or the waspish intransigence of Russell. Granville—a man forty-four years old, whose only important office had been the Secretariat for Foreign Affairs (1851-52)—did his best to fulfil the Queen's demands. He probably would have succeeded but for Russell, who, on being invited to join



him, demanded terms which he could not possibly concede. The Queen, therefore, had to choose between Russell and Palmerston. Of the two she loathed Palmerston least. He could, at any rate, be trusted to suppress any movement for Parliamentary reform. Moreover, in his old age he was less festive and more disposed to tranquillity than he had been in his exuberant prime. So for Palmerston she sent. He dutifully came. He constructed a Cabinet in which Lord John Russell—who was created Earl Russell in 1861—consented to serve as Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Gladstone became Chancellor of the Exchequer—an event which marks the merging of the Peelites with the Whigs. Under Palmerston the country enjoyed for six years a happy stagnation without parallel since the halcyon days of Lord Liverpool. The Conservative Whigs were in power; the Conservative Tories, under Derby and Disraeli, had nothing to do save to bait Russell over his inept handling of foreign affairs. Only Gladstone and the Radicals, with the growing class of unenfranchised artisans in the great towns, fumed and foamed, waiting for Palmerston and the eighteenth century to die.

The interest of Palmerston's second Ministry centres in the sphere of foreign affairs. In the very year of its establishment the great movement under Cavour and Garibaldi for the liberation and unification of Italy began. Both Palmerston and Russell, although for different reasons, were enthusiastic supporters of Young Italy. Hence they looked with a benevolent approval that made the Queen and the Prince Consort rage when the Sardinians, aided by the French, expelled the Austrians from Lombardy; when the central states drove out the dukes and cardinals and declared for absorption into the Italian kingdom; and when Garibaldi and his two thousand, under the very eyes of a British fleet, landed in Sicily and in Naples and overthrew the Bourbon despotism.

In 1861 the main attention of the Cabinet had to be



directed across the Atlantic, where the great American Civil War broke out. The sympathies of the Ministers were mainly with the revolted Southern States, partly because the Southern States had never been so persistently hostile to Britain as the Northern, partly because the cause of the South seemed to be the cause of freedom, and partly because the Southern States were the great source from which came the cotton to supply the mills of Lancashire. Several of the Ministers—in particular, Gladstone—made some highly injudicious and compromising remarks concerning the Yankees. On more than one occasion, moreover, indefensible acts on both the British and the American side caused a friction that all but led to British participation in the war. But, happily, largely through the pacific influence of the Queen and the Prince Consort—who lamentably died on December 14, 1861—actual hostilities were avoided.

In 1863 the Poles rose in revolt against the Russians. The sympathies of Britain—like those of France and Austria—were strongly on the Polish side, and, accordingly, Russell drafted a long despatch to the Court of the Tsar, in which the case for the Poles was stated with unanswerable logic. The Tsar, however, realised that behind this verbiage there was no intention on the part of Britain to intervene on behalf of the Poles. He therefore gave vent to his natural irritation at this officious interference by an outsider in what he called a purely domestic concern of his own, and he read Russell a lesson in international manners that was most painful reading, both for Russell himself and for his ministerial chief.

A still deeper humiliation was inflicted on the two old gentlemen the following year, when Austria and Prussia pounced upon Denmark and took Schleswig-Holstein from her. The Danish Princess, Alexandra, had recently married Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (March 10, 1863), and British public opinion was



strongly in favour of the Danish side in this Teutonic quarrel. France and Russia were also emphatically pro-Danish, and it seemed probable that, if Britain would give a lead, a triple alliance might be formed to save Denmark from spoliation. Palmerston went so far as to use language which clearly induced the Danes to think that, in resisting German aggression, they could count on active British support. But when the crisis came (February, 1864) it became evident that the support that Britain was prepared to give was moral only, and not material. And moral support was of no service in a conflict in which Bismarck was concerned. Hence Denmark fell, and British prestige fell with it to an even lower ebb.

Palmerston, indeed, in 1864 was not the Palmerston of 1830 or even of 1848. It was hardly to be expected that he could be. He was eighty years old; and even his irrepressible juvenility was showing signs of weariness. He was still able to ride his horse from London to Harrow in order to visit his old school. He had yet enough energy to vault over five-bar gates. But in October, 1865, just after a General Election had given him another lease of power, he suddenly collapsed and died. With him a distinct era in British history came to an end. The main obstacle to the triumph of democracy was removed.

## CHAPTER XXI

### *EARL RUSSELL—II*

(NOVEMBER, 1865—JUNE, 1866)

NEARLY fourteen years had elapsed since Earl Russell—then Lord John Russell—had last tasted the sweets of supreme authority. That he had been so long relegated to Opposition, or reduced to minor office, had largely



been due to his own intractability and incalculability. He was obsessed by the idea of his own importance; he was possessed by a number of crochets, of which zeal for Protestantism and passion for Parliamentary reform were the most pronounced; he was always convinced that he was always right in all that he strongly believed. He was therefore a difficult man to get on with.

When, however, in 1865 he became Prime Minister for the second time, he was seventy-three years old, and age, together with many domestic sorrows, had begun to smooth his asperities. He made no great change in the Cabinet which he took over from Palmerston; he took the occasion, however, to elevate Lord Hartington, to introduce Mr. G. J. Goschen, and to transfer the Foreign Office from himself to the Earl of Clarendon. Nevertheless, although the Ministry remained in outward form much as it had been before, in spirit it was thoroughly new. Russell himself was free as never before to indulge in an orgy of Parliamentary reform, while the House of Commons, under the leadership of Gladstone, was a wholly different body from the same House with Palmerston, that "cynical octogenerium"—as someone happily called him—in command.

The zeal of Russell and the seriousness of Gladstone brought the Government down with a crash in less than seven months. Even that brief period was not free from grave trouble. There was a formidable insurrection in Jamaica, followed by a formidable agitation in Britain concerning the severity with which Governor Eyre had suppressed it. The cattle plague made havoc among the herds of England, causing acute agricultural distress. The country passed through one of the worst commercial crises in its history, among the many disastrous failures that occurred being that of the great bill-discounting firm of Overend and Gurney, whose liabilities amounted to £19,000,000.

In spite, however, of the anxiety and gloom of the



time, Russell could not be prevented from bringing in a Parliamentary Reform Bill—a Bill which few besides himself wanted, and a Bill which satisfied no one at all. It proposed an extension of the borough franchise from £10 to £7 householders, a slight reduction in the county qualification, and a few other modest changes. It said nothing about any redistribution of seats. Russell hoped that its extreme moderation would secure its passage without much controversy. He was mistaken. The Bill was denounced from all sides. Robert Lowe and a band of dissentient Liberals—who got the nickname “Adullamites”—attacked it as wholly unnecessary and as dangerously opening the flood-gates to democracy. John Bright and the Radicals, on the other hand, characterised its cautious concessions to the lower middle class as insults to the expectant artisans. Derby and Disraeli watched with interest and delight the spectacle of their opponents destroying one another. They readily, however, lent the Tory vote to that of the dissentient Liberals and the disgruntled Radicals when, on June 18, the Bill was wrecked in committee. Russell and Gladstone were furiously angry with everyone. Russell’s wrath was impotent; he never held any office again. Gladstone, however, had a long career of powerful and effective rage before him. He had yet to become the “Grand Old Man.”

## CHAPTER XXII

### *THE EARL OF DERBY—III*

(JUNE, 1866—FEBRUARY, 1868)

RUSSELL’S resignation at the end of June, 1866, brought Derby back to the office of Prime Minister for the third time; and for the third time, also, Disraeli accompanied him as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the



House of Commons. Their observations during the preceding year had convinced them that the time had come to settle, if possible for ever, the Parliamentary reform question. Russell had agitated it until the House of Commons had become sick of it; Bright had taken it up with a passionate fervour that had shaken the working class out of their long indifference. Monster meetings were being held all over the country. Riots were taking place in towns where the authorities tried to restrict freedom of assembly. The Conservatives, too, were anxious to show that Parliamentary reform was not the exclusive monopoly of the Whigs. Derby himself, when Mr. Stanley, had been a foremost champion of the Bill of 1832. Disraeli, also, at the same date, when a candidate for the seat of High Wycombe, had been outspoken in his support of the progressive cause. There was, moreover, no subject to which he had given more close and continuous attention, as the bulky volume of his speeches on the matter abundantly witnesses.

The Conservatives hoped, too, that by taking up and dealing with this problem of Parliamentary reform they might be able (1) to "dish the Whigs," (2) to win the gratitude and the votes of the new electorate, (3) to keep electoral change within the limits of prudence. In all three respects they were disappointed. The Whigs were not "dished," but merely exasperated into more lively activity by this Conservative appropriation of their pet measure. The new electors were not in the least impressed by the Conservative concession of a reform which they well knew the Conservatives would never have granted but for the constant agitation of the Whigs and the growing pressure of public disturbance: on the earliest possible occasion they demonstrated their ingratitude by inflicting upon their benefactors a heavy defeat. Finally, the Conservatives were not able to keep electoral change within any of the limits of prudence. The Conservatives were, as usual, a minority in the



House of Commons. They were faced by an infuriated majority torn between passion for Parliamentary reform and desire to destroy the Ministry that was making its passage possible. Disraeli played the House of Commons game with consummate skill and immense enjoyment. Again and again by dividing his enemies he evaded defeat. But he did so only at the cost of concessions that completely changed the character of his Bill, and converted it into a measure that horrified, not only Lowe, but also Russell—a measure almost Radical enough to satisfy the heart of Bright. The Conservatives were mesmerised with amazement; they could not imagine where Derby was letting Disraeli lead them. Three Cabinet Ministers resigned, and one of them—Lord Cranborne, afterwards Marquis of Salisbury—denounced Disraeli's Bill as "a political betrayal which has no parallel in our annals." The Bill as finally passed into law (August, 1867) enfranchised the bulk of the urban artisan class by giving the vote to all householders and to £10 lodgers. It, further, lowered the county qualification and effected some redistribution of seats.

The passing of this Reform Act of 1867 was the one great achievement of Derby's third Ministry. Derby himself described it, in his usual sporting phraseology, as "a leap in the dark." It was certainly a premature anticipation of the inevitable—a granting of political power before education had rendered possible an intelligent use of it. Disraeli, however, was definitely and avowedly a champion of the working class—which he liked and trusted—as against the middle class—which he detested and despised. He viewed the Reform Act, even as expanded beyond all his original intentions, with complacency. He looked forward, with a confidence which before his death seemed justified, to the emergence of the Conservative working man. Other measures for the benefit of the labouring class that he carried were a new and improved Factory Act and a



Master and Servant Act that has been well described as "the first positive success of the trade unions in the legislative field."

During Derby's Ministry occurred the Austro-Prussian War, the second of the three great steps by means of which Bismarck unified Germany under the hegemony of Prussia. Derby, whose foreign policy was one of strict non-intervention in the affairs of the Continent, kept well out of the fray. Only when it was over did he participate, and, indeed, take the lead, in the Conference of London, which settled the status of Luxemburg in the new Germanic system (May, 1868).

The policy of non-intervention in Europe, however, did not by any means imply indifference to everything that went on outside the limits of Great Britain. Disraeli, who was the real mainspring of the Government, was the great—perhaps the first great—imperialist. He conceived Britain, not as a European kingdom, but as the centre of a worldwide empire. He was prepared to take strong and prompt action where Britain's imperial destiny was concerned. He did not, for instance, hesitate to spend £8,000,000 on a campaign in Abyssinia, whose ruler had outraged the rights of British subjects. This period of his power also saw the completion of Canadian Federation (1867).

So largely did Derby leave the conduct of affairs to Disraeli that early in 1868 he felt it proper to retire and to leave his faithful lieutenant in undisputed command. The old Earl's health was failing; he suffered horribly from attacks of gout. The disease, however, did not deprive him of his powers of pungent expression. It is told that about this time he received from an enterprising wine-merchant a sample of port warranted to be "good for the gout." He acknowledged the receipt of the sample as follows: "I have tasted your wine. I prefer the gout."

Derby retired in February, 1868, and he lived for only another year and a half. His last public act was



to appear in the House of Lords in the summer of 1869 to make a speech, marked by much of his old fire and force, in opposition to Gladstone's plans for the spoliation of the Irish Church.

## CHAPTER XXIII

*BENJAMIN DISRAELI—I*

(FEBRUARY—DECEMBER, 1868)

LONG had Disraeli waited and served before he succeeded in climbing to what he called "the top of the greasy pole." Born 1804, the son of a Jewish literary man, he had been compelled to make his way by sheer force of genius and energy against obstacles of every kind. He belonged to the wrong race, the wrong religion, the wrong social class, the wrong schools, and to no university at all. With such handicaps any ordinary man would have been doomed to perpetual oblivion. Even in his case the bar of religion would have been insuperable if his father, who was a disciple of Voltaire, had not severed his connection with the Synagogue in 1817 and thoughtfully had his son baptised into the Christian Church.

Benjamin hesitated for some time whether he should seek fame in literature or in politics. He wrote novels which by their audacity attracted much attention; but he soon realised that he was at his best in the world of action, and, accordingly, in 1832 he definitely decided for public life. In addition, however, to the obstacles which race and class raised against him, there was the additional difficulty that he did not see eye to eye with either of the two great political parties. As a believer in Crown and Church, he cordially detested the Whigs. As a friend of the working class, as a zealot for social reform, as a lover of the people, he was profoundly



disgusted with the obscurantism and hopelessness of the reactionary Toryism of Wellington, Eldon, and Sidmouth. Three times, therefore, he stood for Parliament as an independent; but three defeats showed him that there was no place in public life for any but party men.

The issue of Peel's Tamworth Manifesto, at the end of 1834, gave him the opening he wanted. Here was a progressive and reformatory Conservatism. He therefore attached himself to Peel, and in 1837 entered Parliament as a Member for Maidstone. For six years he faithfully followed Peel, although with an independence that allowed him to vote against the majority of the Conservatives on several issues, notably the treatment of the Chartists. After 1843 he became more and more alienated from Peel, until in 1846, on the issue of the Corn Laws, he violently opposed him. Three more years saw him firmly established as the leader of the anti-Peelite Conservatives in the House of Commons, as Stanley was in the Lords.

We have seen how for twenty years, with three brief intervals of office, he headed his party in the wilderness of opposition. He did more than head them; he educated them. He educated them out of Protection; he educated them into Parliamentary reform. He converted them from a class party into a national party. He aroused their interest in the working man. He fired their enthusiasm for the Empire. He made them fit for office and for power, when once again the hopes of the electorate were turned upon them.

In 1868, however, Disraeli's period of Premiership was but brief. Gladstone's implacable hatred sought diligently for some means to destroy the enemy. With a genius little short of diabolic the Liberal leader perceived that the disestablishment of the Irish Church would prove the cry most likely to effect his purpose. It would rally to his side all the Irish, all the Whigs, all the Adullamites, all the Radicals; it would rouse the Nonconformist conscience throughout the country



and excite the wildest fervour of the liberation societies. Gladstone's calculation was correct. Defeated in Parliament, Disraeli appealed to the new electorate. It rejected its creator by sending to Westminster a majority of 112 Liberals (November, 1868). Disraeli did not wait for the assembly of Parliament, but sent in his resignation on December 2.

## CHAPTER XXIV

*WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE—I*

(DECEMBER, 1868—FEBRUARY, 1874)

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE, who was fifty-nine years old when he became Prime Minister for the first time, had had a long and varied career in politics. Few men had been so many things, had advocated such different policies, had held offices so numerous or so diverse. When first he had entered Parliament he had been, as Macaulay tells us, "the rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories," so rigid had been his insistence on the religious foundation of society and on the duty of the State to defend and obey the Church. In 1835, like Disraeli, he gave his allegiance to Peel. But, unlike Disraeli, he found favour in the eyes of Peel, received office from Peel, and was rapidly pushed to the front by Peel. Whereas Disraeli broke away from Peel in the matter of the Corn Laws, Gladstone became one of the leading champions of repeal, and one of the strongest and most effective of Free Traders. Under Peel he made a great reputation as President of the Board of Trade (1843-45). As Chancellor of the Exchequer to Aberdeen, Palmerston, and Russell in turn, he brought in a series of great Free Trade Budgets that proclaimed him to be one of the most masterly financiers that this country ever produced. He won, as few other Chan-



cellors have ever done, the confidence and the admiration of the commercial community. So long as Palmerston and Russell remained militant here on earth, his style and stride were cramped. But the death of Palmerston in 1865, and the retirement of Russell in 1868, left him undisputed chief of his party.

And Gladstone's party by this time was definitely the Liberal party. After the severance of the Peelites from the main body of Conservatives in 1846, he had for some ten years hovered uncertainly between the Tories and the Whigs. It would not have taken much in 1855 to induce him to join Stanley's projected Ministry. By 1858, however, the gulf between himself and Disraeli was too wide to be easily bridged. From that time onward their ways diverged until they were as far apart as the poles.

In December, 1868, Gladstone easily got together a Cabinet that included every shade of Liberal opinion, from the dark gamboge of Robert Lowe to the light canary of John Bright. He held his diverse colleagues together with a firm and masterful hand that recalled the autocracy of Peel. His interest was in domestic politics, and he carried a number of measures of high and permanent importance. In particular, he disestablished the Irish Church in 1869; passed a great Elementary Education Act in 1870; abolished religious tests at the universities in 1871; introduced the ballot into elections in 1872; and completely remodelled the Law Courts by the Judicature Act of 1873.

But, successful as the Gladstone Ministry was—according to its own standards—at home, abroad it conspicuously failed. It did not conserve the interests of Britain; it did not maintain the national prestige. Bismarck treated Gladstone—whom he used to call by the disparaging title of “professor”—with supreme contempt, and the power of Britain seemed to have vanished and to be negligible as the Franco-Prussian War ran its course (1870-71). The influence of Britain



appeared to be a thing of the past when Russia, without consulting the signatories of the Treaty of Paris, repudiated the Black Sea clauses of the settlement of 1856, and announced the brazen repudiation to the world.

The country became restless under repeated humiliations. And, as Gladstone fell in popular favour, Disraeli rose. In February, 1872, when he rode through the streets of London on his return from the thanksgiving service held in St. Paul's to celebrate the recovery of the Prince of Wales from his serious illness, he was greeted by an ovation that told him he was on the eve of triumph. A visit which he paid to Manchester in April, 1872, was an occasion of unprecedented enthusiasm, and the four hours' speech which he delivered in the Free Trade Hall proved to be an unequalled presentation of the Conservative creed as he had reshaped it during the twenty years of tribulation. A second and still greater triumph awaited him at the Crystal Palace in June, 1872, where he proclaimed the evangel of Tory democracy—viz., the maintenance of British institutions, the development and consolidation of the Empire, the elevation of the condition of the people.

Gladstone realised that the days of his administration were numbered. He tried to resign in March, 1873, but Disraeli refused to take office any more without a majority in the House of Commons to back him up. Gladstone, therefore, had to struggle on for nine more months. In January, 1874, he appealed to the country. When the returns came in he found himself in a minority of fifty. For the first time since Peel's triumph in 1841, the Conservatives had a majority in the House of Commons. Gladstone, following Disraeli's precedent of 1868, did not wait for the new Parliament to meet, but resigned on February 17.



## CHAPTER XXV

*BENJAMIN DISRAELI, EARL OF  
BEACONSFIELD—II*

(FEBRUARY, 1874—APRIL, 1880)

At last Disraeli's opportunity had come. For the first time in his life he found himself in power as well as in office. With a good working majority in the House of Commons, with a complacent House of Lords, and with a gracious and delighted Sovereign, what could he not accomplish? But, alas! power and opportunity had come to him too late. He was seventy years old. Both his health and his spirit were broken. He suffered horribly from chronic asthma, bronchitis, and gout. He had recently lost his devoted wife and the home that she had provided for him. He was lonely and forlorn. Nevertheless, he and his company of vigorous and able colleagues did some notable and valuable work, especially during the four years 1874-78.

First and foremost, they passed a large mass of long-overdue social legislation—Acts relating to artisans' dwellings, friendly societies, trade unions, agricultural tenancies, merchant vessels, public health, factories, enclosures, river pollution, education, and so on. Secondly, they gave much thought to the fostering and federation of the Empire. Particularly noteworthy were Disraeli's purchase of the Khedive's shares in the Suez Canal in 1875; his organisation of the Prince of Wales's visit to India the same year; and his proclamation of the assumption of the title "Empress of India" by the Queen. Thirdly, under Disraeli and his able coadjutor, the Marquis of Salisbury, the influence and prestige of Britain were re-established in the chanceries of Europe. To Disraeli himself—through the agency of Queen Victoria, the Tsar, and the German Emperor—was largely due the



frustration of Bismarck's scheme for the final elimination of France in 1875. Again, to Disraeli himself, more than to any other single European statesman, was attributable the settlement of the Eastern Question in 1878. His triumphant return from Germany to England, bringing "peace with honour" in the summer of that year, marks the acme of his fame. He had realised the loftiest aspirations of *Vivian Grey* or of *Contarini Fleming*.

After 1878 the stars in their courses fought against Disraeli—who in 1876, because of failing health, had gone up into the House of Lords as Earl of Beaconsfield. The country became involved, through the action of local officials, in unnecessary and disastrous wars in Afghanistan and Zululand; commercial depression set in; the long-postponed agricultural decline, predicted in 1846, began, and made rapid headway; nothing seemed to go well with either the nation or its Government. In the circumstances Gladstone's "Midlothian campaign" carried the electorate by storm, and in 1880 the Ministry of Lord Beaconsfield was driven from power. The bubble of Disraeli's Tory democracy was pricked. The Tory administration fell on April 19, 1880, and on April 19, 1881, Disraeli died.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE—II

(APRIL, 1880—JUNE, 1885)

IT was no bed of roses that Mr. Gladstone took over from his old enemy in April, 1880, and it did not become more comfortable during the five years in which he tossed about on it. He owed his success in the 1880 election not to his own oratory and the other calamities from which the country was suffering at the time, but



also very largely to the new and excellent organisation of the Liberal party engineered by Joseph Chamberlain, a most efficient screw-manufacturer, and the Birmingham caucus. A National Liberal Federation had been established under Birmingham management in 1877, and it had with marvellous thoroughness captured the constituencies. Its great success and its growing power throughout the country compelled Gladstone, much against his will, to include in his Ministry both Joseph Chamberlain himself (President of the Board of Trade) and his bosom friend, Sir Charles Dilke (President of the Local Government Board, 1882). Both these men were advanced radicals and avowed republicans, and they were a constant source of trouble to the dictatorial old man, to whom they would not kowtow. They formulated a policy of their own and, in spite of the Prime Minister's protests, went about the country advocating such revolutionary proposals as the abolition of the House of Lords, payment of Members of Parliament, taxation of land values, free education, and fundamental changes in the system of local government.

Besides chronic dissensions in his Cabinet, troubles in the overseas Dominions and anxieties in respect of the Continent harassed the venerable Premier. In 1880 the Boers of the Transvaal rose in revolt, defeated the English at Laing's Nek and Majuba Hill, and—so it seemed—wrung from the British Government a recognition of their independence (1881). Next year an insurrection in Egypt under Arabi Pasha necessitated the sending of an army and a fleet into the Mediterranean. In 1883 the Soudan rose in tumultuary revolt against the Egyptian Government under a religious leader known as the "Mahdi." The rebels destroyed an Egyptian army commanded by an Englishman, Hicks Pasha, and secured control of all the open country. General Gordon, sent out from England to superintend the evacuation of the Soudan (1884), was himself shut up in Khartoum and destroyed (January, 1885). Glad-



stone was severely blamed for the inadequacy of his support of Gordon. In 1884 Germany began to realise her policy of securing a "place in the sun" by seizing four separate portions of Africa. Gladstone and his helplessly urbane Foreign Minister looked on impotently, and, but for the vigorous activity of Englishmen and Scotsmen on the spot, would have seen Rhodesia and Nigeria, as well as the Cameroons, Togoland, South-West Africa, and East Africa pass into German possession. Complete paralysis seemed to afflict the distracted Cabinet in the sphere of international relations. The Russian occupation of Penjdeh, on the Afghan frontier, in 1885 seemed to be opening up a new prospect of British humiliation when other causes led to Gladstone's resignation.

These other causes related to affairs nearer home. In domestic politics the main achievement of Gladstone's second Ministry was the carrying of the Reform Act of 1884, supplemented by the Redistribution Act of 1885. By the former measure the county franchise was assimilated to the borough franchise—that is to say, the vote was given to the great class of agricultural labourers. By the latter measure the country was divided into new electoral districts, each one, as a rule, returning a single Member. Irish unrest, however, rather than Parliamentary reform, absorbed the prime attention of the Ministry. In 1877 Charles Stewart Parnell had taken the lead in an agitation for Home Rule, and, in order to make the agitation effective, had devised means to render both the conduct of business in Parliament and the maintenance of order in Ireland impossible. At Westminster violent obstruction reduced the House of Commons to chaos. In Ireland rampant crime—*e.g.*, the assassination of Lord Frederick Cavendish, Chief Secretary, on May 4, 1882—made all life and property insecure. Gladstone tried to soothe the assassins and their instigators by mild concessions—such as the Land Act of 1881—and gentle coercions—such as the Act



for the Prevention of Crimes, 1882. But the resolute Parnellites were not to be conciliated. They demanded self-government, complete self-government, and nothing but self-government. This, for a long time, Gladstone was not prepared to grant. He, as also Mr. Chamberlain, was ready to concede large measures of local autonomy, but this concession was not sufficient to satisfy the agitators. How the conflict would terminate had not been decided when the Government, thoroughly discredited by its failures abroad, was defeated on its Budget proposals in June, 1885.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### *THE MARQUIS OF SALISBURY—I*

(JUNE, 1885—JANUARY, 1886)

THE death of Lord Beaconsfield in April, 1881, had left the Marquis of Salisbury head of the Conservative party. His headship was not, at first, wholly uncontested. Sir Stafford Northcote, Disraeli's Chancellor of the Exchequer and his successor in the leadership of the House of Commons, had a considerable following for a time. He was a venerable and good man, getting on for seventy years old; but he was too amiable for anything, and far too friendly with Mr. Gladstone, whose private secretary he had once been. Lord Randolph Churchill was also in the running. He—at that time thirty-six years old—was rapidly coming on. He was the recognised leader of the young zealots who inherited Disraeli's dream of a Tory democracy. But he was too belligerent for anything: he enjoyed the baiting of Mr. Gladstone as though it were an end in itself, and he called Sir Stafford Northcote a goat. So, between the two, Lord Salisbury rose to uncontested supremacy.



Robert Cecil, born 1830, the second son of the second Marquis, had succeeded to the courtesy title of Viscount Cranborne on the death of his elder brother in 1865, and to the marquise on his father's demise in 1868. He had had a varied and strenuous career. As a younger son who had incurred his father's (inexplicable) displeasure by his marriage at the age of twenty-seven, he had to earn his own living, which he did mainly by very powerful and effective journalism. After wandering about the world for a time he had settled down in London, had entered Parliament in 1853, and had soon made a name for himself as a pungent and combative debater. He by no means limited his attacks to the official Opposition; his criticisms of Derby and Disraeli were sometimes as damaging as had been Derby and Disraeli's criticisms of Sir Robert Peel. The Peelites, indeed, when they were not themselves smarting under the Cecilian whips, were frequently enjoying the spectacle of the chastisement of their Conservative opponents with the Cecilian scorpions. Both Derby and Disraeli, however, recognised that Cecil was a man to be conciliated and won as an ally, and not a critic to be goaded by ostracism into avowed hostility. Disraeli, in particular, was patience and pardon personified. Even though Cecil—then Lord Cranborne—opposed his Reform Bill with unmitigated acrimony, and resigned office rather than condone it, he invited him to join his great Cabinet in 1874, making him, first, Secretary of State for India, and, later (1878), Secretary for Foreign Affairs. In both offices he showed consummate ability. As Foreign Secretary he accompanied his chief to the Berlin Conference of 1878, and he shared the triumph which Beaconsfield achieved on his return.

Salisbury's first Ministry had a very brief career. Yet within the seven months of its existence it succeeded in doing a few important things. It temporarily restored strong and efficient government in Ireland; it passed an Act to encourage tenant ownership in the same



island; it proclaimed a British protectorate over Pondoland and Bechuanaland; it completed the annexation of Upper Burma. In the General Election held at the end of 1885, however, the Conservatives were defeated; they secured only 249 seats as against 335 Liberal successes. That is to say, they were in a minority of eighty-six. But, besides Liberals and Conservatives, there were eighty-six Irish Home Rulers returned. This third party, then, obviously held the balance. To which side would it lean?

## CHAPTER XXVIII

*WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE—III*

(FEBRUARY—JULY, 1886)

LORD SALISBURY met Parliament in January, 1886, but he was defeated before the end of the month during the debate on the Queen's Speech. The real issue was Irish Home Rule; the balance of parties had placed this question in the forefront of politics. Gladstone had made up his mind. Spurred on by some unfounded rumours that the Conservatives were about to adopt the policy of Home Rule, he decided to anticipate and outbid his rivals. He saw Parnell and surrendered to him.

Gladstone's surrender to Parnell had unexpected results. He had been quite aware that his acceptance of the policy of Home Rule would mean the alienation of the Marquis of Hartington and other old-fashioned Whigs; but he was not prepared to find that advanced Radicals like Joseph Chamberlain and John Bright would break away from him. But so they did. They resented the autocracy that required them to change their opinions, unconsulted, at a moment's notice; Chamberlain, always an imperialist, was alarmed by the spectre of the disintegration of the Empire; Bright,



always a Protestant, was scared by the bogie of a new Papal ascendancy across the Irish Sea. The "Liberal Unionists" numbered nearly a hundred in the House of Commons, and when Gladstone introduced his Home Rule Bill in June, 1886, their votes, added to those of the Conservatives, sufficed to counter-balance the combined votes of the Irish Nationalists and the Gladstonian Liberals. The Bill was rejected by 343 to 313.

Gladstone at once dissolved Parliament and appealed to the country. The country expressed its opinion of his manœuvring by sending him back with only 191 followers. He did not wait to meet the new Parliament. On July 30 he placed his resignation in the hands of the Queen, who accepted it with the liveliest manifestations of satisfaction that royal manners permitted her to display.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### *THE MARQUIS OF SALISBURY—II*

(AUGUST, 1886—AUGUST, 1892)

THE spectacular collapse of the Home Rule Government brought Salisbury back to power. The six years during which he remained in office were, on the whole, years of tranquillity and prosperity. Their general tone was happily symbolised in the national rejoicings and imperial pageantry that characterised the Queen's Jubilee in 1887.

Under the strong and able, yet sympathetic and intelligent, rule of Mr. A. J. Balfour, Ireland was restored to a peace and well-being such as she had not enjoyed for many years. At home an Imperial Defence Act (1888) provided for a considerable strengthening of the fortifications of the British Isles, while a Local Government Act (1888), setting up county councils,



relieved the congestion of business under which the justices of the peace were beginning to break down. In 1891 an Education Act made free the schooling which the Act of 1870 had made compulsory.

The department, however, in which Salisbury's second Ministry most particularly shone was that of foreign affairs. At first this department was under the nominal control of the good and gentle Stafford Northcote—now Earl of Iddesleigh—but, on his sudden death (January 12, 1887), Lord Salisbury himself took over the duties of the office. In 1890-91 he made a series of agreements with Continental Powers respecting overseas Dominions that immensely relieved European tension and left the British Empire free to develop in vast new regions.

The successes of the Salisbury Government were solid rather than sensational. Whilst they were silently being achieved, Mr. Gladstone, accompanied by his Irish and other henchmen, was touring the country, pouring forth the vials of his fury. England was not convinced of the desirability of Home Rule; but Scotland and Wales were won over. Hence, at the General Election of 1892, the Celtic fringe gave Mr. Gladstone a majority of forty pledged to the policy of Home Rule.

## CHAPTER XXX

### *WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE—IV*

(AUGUST, 1892—MARCH, 1894)

By becoming Prime Minister for the fourth time, in August, 1892, Mr. Gladstone broke all previous records. He broke another record, too, by undertaking the burden of governing the Empire when he was already eighty-three years old. Perhaps, also, he established a third record by taking office entangled by a larger number of embarrassing pledges than any Prime



Minister among his predecessors. He was committed to the so-called Newcastle Programme, which bound him to introduce (1) Home Rule for Ireland, (2) Welsh Disestablishment, (3) increased powers for the London County Council, (4) parish councils, (5) local veto, (6) reform of the House of Lords, (7) payment of Members, and (8) manhood suffrage. He had tried to secure the aid of all sorts of Radical enthusiasts in his efforts to overthrow the massive Salisbury régime. When in office he found his varied and mutually antipathetic followers a source of extreme inconvenience.

Home Rule, of course, was the prime concern of the new Government. In 1893 Mr. Gladstone brought forward his second Bill, which differed in some important particulars from the first Bill. It passed the House of Commons in September, but was rejected in the Lords by an overwhelming majority—419 to 41. Mr. Gladstone then decided to retire. He remained in office, however, long enough to carry his Parish Councils Act (January, 1894). In March following he finally withdrew from the political arena which he had entered sixty-two years before. He had seen some surprising changes, and he himself had passed through some still more amazing transformations. The rising hope of the stern and unbending Tories of William IV.'s time had gradually become the *bête noir* of their late Victorian grandchildren.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE EARL OF ROSEBERY

(MARCH, 1894—JUNE, 1895)

THE retirement of Mr. Gladstone left the Liberal leadership for some time in doubt. The "Grand Old Man" had been for so long a time unique in authority, and supreme in eminence, that no one else had counted



at all. If the Queen had consulted Gladstone himself on the subject of the Liberal succession, he would have recommended Earl Spencer; the Queen, however, did not do so. If the Liberal party had been asked to elect their leader, they would have chosen Sir William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Gladstone's successor in the leadership of the Commons; their suffrages, however, were not invited. On the very day (March 3) that Gladstone handed the seals of his office to Her Majesty she invited the Earl of Rosebery to accept them.

His appointment as Prime Minister was unquestionably a mistake. He had no enthusiasm for Liberal causes. He did not believe in Home Rule for Ireland, and he alienated the Nationalists at once by announcing that Home Rule could not be conceded until "the predominant partner"—*i.e.*, England—should decide in its favour. He was an imperialist, and, as such, most obnoxious to Harcourt, Morley, Campbell-Bannerman, and the "Little England" school generally. True, he wished to reform the House of Lords; but he wished to reform it to make it stronger, not, like his colleagues, to reduce it to impotence. Add to differences of opinion the additional disability of a temper and behaviour that gave offence, and the marvel is that his Ministry survived for fifteen months, not that it came to grief so soon. From the first he quarrelled with Sir William Harcourt, his disappointed and disgruntled rival, who could never forget that he had been Rosebery's chief at the Home Office, 1881-83. Harcourt was angry and disobedient; Rosebery was autocratic and disdainful. Soon the Prime Minister and his Chancellor of the Exchequer were hardly on speaking terms, and unseemly brawls broke the tranquillity of Downing Street.

Harcourt, with the support of the majority of the Cabinet, insisted on bringing before Parliament measures of which Rosebery either totally disapproved



or else regarded with very lukewarm zeal. Such were his famous Budget of 1894, in which the death duties were piled on to the rich with predatory malignity, the Welsh Disestablishment Bill, and the Local Veto Bill. It became clear that an irate demagogue could not indefinitely be allowed, out of spite to his official chief, to have a free hand to effect a social revolution. Hence, Rosebery rather welcomed than otherwise a chance defeat in the Commons on an armament amendment (June 21, 1895). He at once resigned, and by doing so succeeded in scotching both the disestablishment and the teetotal measures. Neither he nor Harcourt ever returned to public life. They had between them achieved a destiny similar to that of the Kilkenny cats.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### *THE MARQUIS OF SALISBURY—III*

(JUNE, 1895—AUGUST, 1902)

DURING the period of the Gladstonian ascendancy the bonds between the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists had been drawn very close. When, therefore, Salisbury returned to the headship of the Government—which until 1900 he combined with the Secretariat for Foreign Affairs—he included in his Cabinet not only members of his own party, but also the leaders of the Liberal Unionists—in particular, the Duke of Devonshire (formerly Lord Hartington) and Mr. Chamberlain. The Duke of Devonshire, leader of the old Whigs, as easily and happily accommodated himself to a Conservative environment as had the Duke of Portland a hundred years before. Mr. Chamberlain, however, was a fish entirely out of water, and, in order to get into his element again, he made the Conservatives come his way with large measures of housing reform, local government reform, employers' liability extension,



free education, agricultural holdings reform, and so on. Most of Mr. Chamberlain's energies, however, were devoted to the work of the Colonial Office, of which he was made the head. Here for eight years, under Lord Salisbury and his successor, he did a most remarkable work. His labours were immensely fruitful, and they would have been even more so had it not been for the outbreak of the lamentable Boer War in 1899. This unhappy struggle, which all but developed into a general European war, dragged its weary length beyond the end both of the century and of the reign of Queen Victoria. Lord Salisbury, although he knew his health to be failing fast, felt it to be his duty to remain in office until peace was secured. Then he resigned.

Salisbury's own particular work during these eventful years was, on the one hand, to keep the peace of his Cabinet, where Mr. Chamberlain's unabandoned and unrepudiated Radicalism clashed horribly with the staid reactionism of old-fashioned Tories like Mr. Chaplin; and, on the other hand, to keep the peace of Europe, where Britain, in dangerous (if splendid) isolation, found herself faced by an unfriendly France, an unfriendly Russia, and an unfriendly Germany. With masterly skill Salisbury steered the country safely through the many dangerous rapids of these critical years. But the strain upon him was tremendous. In 1900 he devolved the foreign secretariat upon the capable and conciliatory Liberal Unionist, the Marquis of Lansdowne. Then he waited patiently until the re-establishment of peace in South Africa, and the Coronation of King Edward, both in 1902, gave him the opportunity of retirement and repose.

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